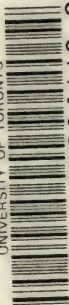


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LIFE AND TIMES

OF

JOHN DE WYCLIFFE.

“The true internal wound of the church was, in his eyes, but one of the many symptoms of its disease.”

MERLE D'AUBIGNÉ.

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THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY;

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PREFACE.

THE name of Wycliffe is inseparably associated with the history of human development. Nothing therefore could be more opportune at the present crisis, than to bring into clearer light those distinctive principles under the influence of whose inward life and force he acted so conspicuous a part on the stage of Europe.

To do this, it was not needful that we should rigidly inquire into those peculiär doctrines and opinions which entered into his theological creed. We have gone as far in this direction as was deemed either prudent or instructive. We have rather sought and selected the ground which we occupy in common with the great reformer. We have not forgotten the distance which measures the interval between the nineteenth and the fourteenth centuries, nor through what stages of development and progress the nations of Europe, and especially our own beloved England, have passed. We have judged of the great man and his doings by the light of

his own age. And though every true Protestant will find points of separation, still it should be matter of devout gratitude to God, that he so far enlightened the mind of his servant in the nature of Christ's kingdom, and so endued him with grace and fortitude, as to enable him to withstand, manfully and successfully, the encroachments and the usurpations of a power which would have trampled the liberties and the honour of our country in the dust.

The life of Wycliffe was devoted to one thing, and therefore was lacking in that variety of fact and incident, which gives to biography its chief attraction and interest. The record, however, is valuable as throwing light upon his times, and as revealing the necessity of that great Reformation for which he so intensely sighed and laboured. Brief as the narrative is, its simple perusal will convince the reader that the Popery of the nineteenth century is the same with the Popery of the fourteenth century; and will animate him, we trust, with a spirit of grateful attachment to those Protestant and Scriptural principles for which Wycliffe and Luther so manfully contended.

AUGUST, 1851.

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LIFE AND TIMES
OF
JOHN DE WYCLIFFE.

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RELIGIOUS CONDITION OF ENGLAND IN THE BEGIN-
NING OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

Popular ignorance—The Bible but little known—Defective teaching and inefficient pulpit ministrations—Ambition and corruption of the priesthood—Corresponding degeneracy of the public morals—Religious degradation of the people.

THE close of the twelfth century was marked by the first faint dawn of that noble literature, whose advances and triumphs throw the glories of conquest into deeper shade. The progress of a people in letters indicates the point of civilization and of culture at which they have arrived. Had the throne been filled by any other man than John—that embodiment and personification of human weakness—there can be no doubt that England would not only have taken the precedence of all the European nations in

the race of intellectual and moral improvement, but would have left them at no common distance. The single act by which he sold his kingdom for a peace with Rome, for ever impresses with ignominy the character of this prince.* We conceal not the fact, that the ecclesiastical hierarchy had been fast encroaching on the province of the civil power—that the government of John was in danger from the spirit of discontent which characterized the clergy—that his kingdom was under the interdicts of the Holy See—that he himself had been excommunicated, and was now threatened with deposition—that his excommunication, by reaching to all who had any intercourse with him, amounted to the annihilation of government, law, and property—the impunity of crimes, as well as the invalidity of all contracts and dealings—that, in these circumstances, he had but a choice of evils, either to submit to the power which was bearing down upon him

* Under pretence of securing England, and disappointing the French invasion, it was suggested to the monarch, as his last expedient, that he should surrender his kingdom to the pope. He consented. On bended knee, and in the presence of his now alienated people, the king took the following oath:—"I, John, by the grace of God, king of England and lord of Ireland, in order to expiate my sins, do, of my own free will, and by the advice of my barons, give to the church of Rome, to pope Innocent and his successors, the kingdom of England, and all other prerogatives of my crown. I will hereafter hold them as the pope's vassal. I will be faithful to God, to the church of Rome, to the pope my master, and to his successors, legitimately elected. I promise to pay him a tribute of one thousand marks yearly—to wit, seven hundred for the kingdom of England, and three hundred for the kingdom of Ireland."

with such accumulated and crushing force, or lay himself prostrate at the feet of the pontiff; and that to this latter step he was counselled and advised by his barons; still, all this does not, and cannot extenuate his conduct. But for their manly struggle in securing the MAGNA CHARTA, his people would have been reduced to the most enthralling bondage. Under the sanction of the pope's decree, the king recalled all the liberties which he had granted to his subjects, and wantonly broke the promises which he had sworn to observe. His doings rendered him obnoxious to the nation, and his kingdom was in danger. In their extremity, the barons offered the crown to Louis, the eldest son of the king of France. Just at this crisis, the monarch died, and England was saved, first from an ecclesiastical despotism, whose aim all along had been to render the civil power subordinate to the spiritual authority, and afterwards from the degradation of a foreign yoke.

Sir James Macintosh says: "When the barons originally took up arms against John, they exercised the indisputable right of resistance to oppression. They gave a wholesome warning to sovereigns, and breathed into the hearts of nations a high sense of their rights. But in this first stage they knew not how to improve their victory; they took no securities, and made no lasting provision for the time to come." Hence it was that they found themselves in

open collision with the next occupant of the throne ; and Henry, thinking that his crown was far from being secure, stooped to swear fealty to the pope. His holiness released him from his solemn pledge to keep inviolate the several articles of the charter. He had no sympathy with his people, and it was in vain that he asked that people's attachment and support. He depended on the power of the priesthood ; a priesthood better known for its frauds, and forgeries, and laxity of morals, than for its self-denial and holy devotedness to the highest interests of the commonwealth. Society suffered more from the corruption of the church than from all the civil commotions which shook England to its centre. The people were sunk in ignorance and superstition. The region of literary culture was approached by but few, nor did men of letters address their compositions to the vulgar. The popular mind was left almost untouched, and, taking its impressions from the manners and the life of the higher classes, became growingly corrupt and degraded.

It must be kept in mind that the art of printing was still a thing in the future, that the writings of the learned were confined almost exclusively to the priesthood, and that the Scriptures were unknown to the people. Had the capacity of reading been as general in that age as in the present—had the possession of books been as easy—above all, had the Bible

found a place on every man's table, and been, as God designed it to be, the book of the people, how different would have been the religious condition of England at the period now under review! Superstition could never have grown into such gigantic dimensions. The papacy could never have acquired such unparalleled power. Both had their foundation in ignorance. The people were not instructed in the truth of God, and very few of them were in circumstances to procure a copy of the sacred volume. As might be expected, they became the easy prey of cunning and unprincipled men. The most degrading authority was employed to intimidate and bring them into submission. Freedom of thought was denied them. They sank down to be the mere creatures of an enslaving power. The free and uplifting genius of Christianity was outraged in the vassalage which was imposed upon the human mind.

We do not say that the darkness which had settled and deepened on the human intellect was unbroken. Lines of light, more or less distinct, were to be seen in the depth of that long night. From the time of the Conquest, men had been raised up to protest against the corruptions of the church, and to be the honest expositors of God's truth. Among the highest ecclesiastical dignitaries, were to be found those who had loftier objects and purer aims than the accumulation of wealth, or the cementing and

strengthening of their political influence. While Lanfranc was "the stern foe of monastic corruption;" while Anselm, his successor in the see of Canterbury, "was better instructed in the doctrines peculiar to the gospel," and held those doctrines, "associated with that feeling of spiritual humility and confidence which they so powerfully tend to produce when truly embraced;" while "the sentences" of Peter Lombard "illustrate the moral condition of man, and the articles of the Christian salvation;" and while Edmund could not have written as he has done "without censuring, at least indirectly, the false doctrines, the debasing customs, and indeed nearly the whole of the superstitions so prevalent in his day,"—such was the moral condition of the people, that archbishop Peckham represented them, in a congregation of his clergy, as in a state of utter religious destitution. "To supply this serious deficiency, the primate submitted to the council a list of topics which in future should constitute the matter of regular parochial instruction. This summary includes the Decalogue, the fourteen articles of faith, the seven deadly sins, the seven principal virtues, the seven works of mercy, and the usual sacraments. Of the fourteen articles of faith, the first seven relate to the mysteries of the Trinity, the remaining to the person, the sufferings, and the general mediation of the Saviour. The seven deadly sins include pride, anger, hatred, impiety, covetousness and in-

temperance. The seven works of mercy are to compassionate the hungry, the thirsty, and the naked, to bury the friendless, and to aid the sick, the neglected, and the poor. Of the principal virtues, faith, hope, and charity, are described as referring to God; while justice, fortitude, temperance, and prudence, are viewed as relating to men. These epitomes of religious instruction are thus particularly stated, because they are frequently mentioned in the history of the church, through several centuries preceding the Reformation. In the present instance, they were published with explanations, which, if really needed, imply the state of the inferior clergy to have been that of the lowest barbarism. Hence the extent of the improvement proposed by this metropolitan reformer consisted in providing that each clerk should deliver four sermons to his parishioners within a year. These discourses also were to be on some of the themes above described, each of which was so far explained as to demand from the preacher but little more than the mechanical effort of transcription.”*

Such was the provision made for the perfecting of the moral and religious manhood of the people. Their teachers were to address them on subjects of personal and everlasting moment, four times during the year! And what was the character of the instruction?

* Vaughan's *Life of Wycliffe*, vol. i. pp. 200, 201.

Was it of such a kind that it could not but contribute to quicken the life of the soul, and insure the development of true piety? How was it received, and to what extent? The answer to these questions would exhibit the clergy in no favourable light. When Reynolds was called to the primacy, the spirit of unprincipled traffic obtained to a fearful extent among the heads of the church, and the people, neglected and untaught, degenerated, till the whole framework of society became disjointed and broken. The fourteenth century set in like a night of deeper gloom. The reign of ignorance and of crime, of superstition and of profligacy, now reached its height. The most flagrant abuses were sanctioned in the church; cunningly devised fables were propagated in place of the gravest and most saving realities; and wherever the spark of truth was seen enkindled, every effort was made to extinguish it. Chaucer had already lashed the clergy for their vices, yet nothing could exceed the impiety of the monastic orders. Their conduct had become so openly and shamefully scandalous, as to bring upon them no common degree of odium and reprobation. Their wickedness was too notorious and too glaring to escape the censure and condemnation of some of the more pious and worthy doctors of their own communion. Shocked by the enormities and vices practised by these monks, they ardently longed for a reformation of the church.

With these facts before us, we cease to wonder at the degeneracy of the public morals, and the little hold which religion took of the mind of the country. The marvel would be had it been otherwise. We know well how difficult it is in our own day, with a purer worship, a more faithful evangelical ministry, a more searching, salutary discipline, a more healthful vital influence, and with all the appliances of an unfettered Christianity, to keep alive in the popular mind a correct state of religious knowledge and feeling. And yet, in the absence of all these agencies and influences, there were some noble spirits sighing for deliverance from the corruptions of the times. Peculiar difficulties, however, stood in the way of a reformation. It was something too grand to be effected by the timid and the unbelieving. It demanded the faith and the fortitude of a martyr. Still, there were those who were ready not to shrink from either suffering or death in such an enterprise. Among these stands first and pre-eminent the magnanimous and immortal John Wycliffe, who arose as the morning star of the Reformation, and whose doctrines so deeply impressed the popular mind.

CHAPTER II.

WYCLIFFE'S EARLY HISTORY.

His birth and education—His connexion with Oxford, and his course of study—His eminence in scholastic learning—His profound veneration for the inspired writings—Acquires the title of Evangelic Doctor—Development of his mental and religious character.

It is now generally admitted that to the little village of Wiclif, distant about six miles from the town of Richmond, in the county of York, belongs the distinction of being the birthplace of the reformer. And if, as tradition affirms, he was related to the family who claimed to be the lords of the manor and patrons of the rectory from the Conquest down to the beginning of the seventeenth century, (when, by the marriage of the heiress, the property passed to a house of another name,) we can at once perceive how he came to sustain the cognomen of De Wycliffe. Nothing was more common, from the Norman invasion, than for families to take an appellation derived from the place of their residence. The name of the reformer is certainly

a local one, received, not from his parents, but from the parish in which he happened to be born. That no traces of intercourse between himself and his relatives should be found in his writings, may be accounted for from the fact, that the family continuing firmly attached to the superstitions and errors which he sought to destroy, refused to recognise, or at least to correspond with him, and that in the prosecution of his studies he was left to support himself by the application and employment of his own talents.

Of his childhood we know nothing. Where or from whom he received the rudiments of his education—what were the earlier dispositions and tendencies of his mind—to what extent either his intellectual or moral character was developed—or what indications there were of future pre-eminence, must all be passed over in silence. The fact that a star lies too far down in the field of space to come within the range of our own instruments, is no proof that it does not exist. And so the absence of all authentic record touching the early life and history of our reformer, does not in the least affect the conjecture and the probability that his younger years were marked by some outcomings of that intellectual might and mastery, which rendered his subsequent course so conspicuous and so memorable. This is the more likely, inasmuch as the provisions for education were no longer

confined to ecclesiastical and monastic establishments. - Local schools had been set up in various parts of the kingdom, and extended from the towns even to the villages. Many of these schools were conducted with great ability, and by men of rare talents. In them were taught classics, mathematics, astronomy, belles lettres, and other branches of science. Nor can we doubt that in one of these institutions, or in one of the seminaries connected with religious houses, Wycliffe received that education which qualified him to enter the university of Oxford. He was first admitted, in the seventeenth year of his age, as a student at Queen's College; but its recent foundation, and the incompleteness of its arrangements, failed to offer those advantages and facilities which were necessary to a mind so earnest as his in the pursuit of knowledge and the prosecution of study. Dissatisfied with its provisions, he very soon left it, and entered Merton College, in which, not many years prior to Wycliffe's residence there, Bradwardine had delivered his famous lectures on the Cause of God, against Pelagius, and which, as a seminary of learning, was celebrated for many of the most illustrious names in letters and in theology.

Here he pursued his studies with unwearied application. His enemies being witnesses, he was second to none in the domain of philosophy, and in scholastic researches he was incom-

parable.* He undervalued no one branch of science. He no doubt had his predilections for one department of inquiry and of learning above another, but all of them he deemed important. With the study of scholastic philosophy, he combined that of the civil and the canon law, and, as deserving of not less attention, the study of the municipal laws and customs of his own country. "The canons of the church were collected principally from the decrees of the councils and of pontiffs, and formed an authority, not purely ecclesiastical, but one by which a multitude of causes, once pertaining solely to the magistrate, were at length attached to the exclusive jurisdiction of the Christian pastor. Hence a spirit of rivalry arose between the courts of princes and those of the bishops, such as in time rendered it a proverb, that to excel as a canonist required the learning of a civilian, the latter word being understood to denote the secular law as distinguished from the ecclesiastical. There were numerous provincial and national customs opposed to that imperial system of legislation which had disappeared with the fall of the empire, and to that dominion of canonical law which ecclesiastics had reared upon its ruins. This was considerably the case in England, and it ought not perhaps to excite surprise, that the ambition, aided by the pedantry

* "In philosophiâ nulli reputabatur secundus: in scholasticis disciplinis incomparabilis."—Knighton *De Eventibus Angliæ*, col. 2644. This writer had an equal hatred of Wycliffe and his opinions.

of the times, should be found struggling to exclude the native jurisprudence from the class of liberal studies. But it appears that Wycliffe was not to be thus deterred from ascertaining the merit of customs which had descended with the generations of his fatherland, nor at length from preferring them openly to the collections of Gratian, or the laws of the empire." *

But whatever were the nearer or remoter motives which influenced our reformer to take up these various branches of study, it cannot be denied that he made every acquisition subservient to the solemn functions of that office to which he had devoted his life. He was designed for the Christian ministry; and to the writings of the early fathers he applied himself with an energy and an earnestness which nothing could exhaust. If among schoolmen Aristotle was "the only safe guide to the meaning of Saint Paul," and if his philosophy was the only key by which the treasures of revealed theology could be unlocked, then Wycliffe soon possessed himself of this key. He committed to memory many of the more intricate portions of Aristotle, made himself familiar with the earliest and most distinguished writers of the Christian church, and became the most eminent doctor in theology in those days. He availed himself of every known or accessible means of widening

* Vaughan's Life of Wycliffe, vol. i. pp. 244, 245.

the field of his knowledge, and of giving him a clearer insight into the deep things of God. His own university could boast of some of the most illustrious names in the sacred domain of theology. These stood high in his estimation, and their writings, in conjunction with those of Augustine and other distinguished fathers, challenged his closer and more devout attention. His intense application in this higher and more sacred department, must be regarded as indicating his supreme love of truth. It is not affirmed that he always reached his object, but it was the goal to which he pressed forward—the mighty prize which he had set before him.

As might be expected, he turned with intense interest to the study of the inspired writings. For some ages, the Bible had been all but a sealed book. The authority of the church still forbade any appeal to the Scriptures. The student of the sacred text came under the ban and proscription of the scholastic philosophy. The compilations of men were in higher repute than the teachings of Christ and his apostles. The reader of Peter Lombard might assure himself of a willing audience, while the mere Scriptural teacher would be rejected and treated with indifference. That illustrious friar of the thirteenth century, Roger Bacon, tells us, "The graduate who reads or keeps to the text of Scripture is compelled to give way to the

reader of the sentences, who everywhere enjoys honour and precedence. He who reads the sentences has the choice of his hour, and ample entertainment among the religious orders. He who reads the Bible is destitute of these advantages, and sues, like a mendicant, to the reader of the sentences, for the use of such hours as it may please him to grant. He who reads the sums of Divinity is everywhere allowed to hold disputations, and is venerated as master; he who only reads the text is not permitted to dispute at all, which is absurd."* With this testimony before us, it must be acknowledged, that "the Biblical method of instruction was trampled under foot by the overbearing authority of irrefragable and seraphic doctors. And yet, in this state of the public mind it was that Wycliffe ventured to associate the study of the Scriptures with the keenest pursuit of the scholastic metaphysics, and to assign to the Bible the full supremacy which belongs to it, as disclosing to us the Way, the Truth, and the Life."† His powers of debate in the scholastic exercises or public disputations were indeed unrivalled; but his proficiency in the science of theology challenges our highest admiration. In the writings of the schoolmen, he was careful to distinguish between truth and error, and to separate the precious from the vile. Following

* Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, vol. iii. p. 93.

† Le Bas' Life of Wycliffe, p. 78.

the advice of some of the better and more enlightened teachers, to lay aside philosophical abstraction and subtlety, and derive the sublime science of salvation from the Holy Scriptures with that purity and simplicity with which it was there delivered by the inspired writers, the reformer endeavoured to restore the ancient practice of lecturing on morals and theology from the book itself. This was a line of action which called for no ordinary courage. While he could compete with any of his fellows in metaphysics and philosophy, he far surpassed them all in Biblical science ; so that, while one was renowned for his profoundness, another for his perspicuousness, a third for all that was venerable, and a fourth as the brightest light in a constellation that was all brilliant—it remained to Wycliffe to receive the higher honour still of being the evangelic or gospel doctor. That which had excluded other men from the leading universities of Europe, won for him the most honourable title and the most enviable which any mere man could wear. To be “mighty in the Scriptures,” was something which was deemed worthy of apostolic commendation ; nor can it be doubted that his ardent attachment to the inspired writings placed our reformer in circumstances of peculiar difficulty and of imminent peril.

We cannot suppose that so earnest and profound a student of God’s word could be other-

wise than personally and powerfully impressed with its momentous truth. This presupposes that he had experienced that great spiritual change which involves nothing less than the renovation of the whole man—"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." At what period, or through what instrumentality, this change was effected in Wycliffe, it is impossible now to determine; but if the tree is to be judged by its fruit—if the life is to be taken as the index to the state of the heart, then there is evidence enough to satisfy us, that while the reformer was yet a student, he had the happy consciousness of his personal salvation. Scarcely had he more than reached his majority, when the most destructive pestilence in the annals of disease swept over Europe, and made the most fearful havoc in England. This was in the year 1347. Its ravages were such as might well have awakened deep thought in the most listless and unconcerned. The mind of Wycliffe was touched to the very inmost; nor did his impressions fade away till he himself had done with time, and had passed into the unsuffering kingdom of God.

Happy had it been for England, had such a visitation left behind it those salutary and saving results for which it was designed. No sooner,

however, had the plague subsided, than society returned to its wonted apathy and irreligion. The places of those godly and devoted men who had fallen a sacrifice by their unwearied attention to the interests of their flocks, were filled up by others who were grossly incompetent for the duties of any spiritual office. To chastise the vices of the clergy, among whom he conceived was the seat of that great national calamity which had passed over the land, and to awaken the people to the claims of true religion, Wycliffe penned a little tract, entitled "The Last Age of the Church." It appeared in 1356, when he had just reached the thirty-second year of his age.* By many the pestilence had been regarded as a certain precursor of the final judgment; and, falling in with the popular apprehension, the reformer believed that the designs of God were hastening to an end, and that the close of the fourteenth century would bring with it the close of the world's history. To this conjecture he was led by the predictions of an Italian ecclesiastic of the name of Joachim, by certain cabalistic and scarcely intelligible computations, founded on the letters of the Hebrew and Latin alphabets, and by the notion that between the first and second advent of our Lord there were to be four

* This tract was first printed in the year 1840, from a manuscript in the Dublin University Library, and published under the editorship of James Hentham Todd, D.D., Fellow of Trinity College.

periods of great tribulation in the history of the church ; the first, pointing to the waste and wear of heathen persecutions ; the second, to the spread and prevalence of open heresy ; the third, to the more glaring sin of simony, which made merchandise of God's church ; and the fourth, to the progress and final triumph of Antichrist, as belonging, with the one preceding, more immediately to the fourteenth century. Hence the origin and the designation of his tract. But though a genuine production of his pen, it adds little or nothing to his fame. Its chief value is in letting us know how he viewed the events which were then passing over England, the state of society, the prospects of the church, and the interests of God's truth.*

* A few sentences from this tract will give the reader some idea of his sentiments :—

“The pestilent smiting together of people, and the hustling together of realms, and other harms shall come to the earth, because the honours of holy church are given to unworthy men. . . . This mischief shall be so heavy, that well will it be for that man who shall not then be alive.

“That death, vengeance of sword, and mischiefs unknown before, by which men in those days shall be punished, shall befall them because of the sins of priests. Hence men shall fall upon them, and cast them out of their fat benefices, and shall say—He came into his benefice by his kindred, and this by a covenant made before ; he, for his worldly service, came into God's church, and this for money. Then every such priest shall say—Alas ! alas ! that no good spirit dwelt with me at my coming into the church of God. Men of holy church shall be despised as carrion ; as dung shall they be cast out in open places.

“Jesus Christ entered into holy things, that is, into holy church, by holy living and holy teaching ; and with his blood

With his mind so impressed with the corruptions of the church, and the vices of society in general, we may well conceive that as a reformer he set himself no common task. Difficulties and dangers crowded upon his path, but, nothing intimidated by the one, he never grew pale in the presence of the other. He was braced for action; and with his soul all on fire, he challenged every opposing force. Conscious of his intellectual might, and with the shield of faith over him, he was prepared to grapple with the sturdiest and the strongest of the enemy. To check the evils of the time, he was increasingly diligent in the dissemination of the truths of Christianity, and more than ever earnest in pressing home its claims and obligations. As an author, he disappears for a time from our view. He withdrew but to prepare and equip himself for future service. The mind has its periods of exhaustion, and therefore must have its seasons of refreshment and invigoration. There are times when it is wise and profitable to withdraw from the busiest scenes and the

he delivered man's nature, as Zechariah writeth in his ninth chapter—'Thou verily; with the blood of witnesses, or of thy testaments, hast led out of the pit them that were bound.' So when we were sinful, and the children of wrath, God's Son came out of heaven, and praying his Father for his enemies, he died for us. Then much rather shall we be saved, now we are made righteous through his blood, as Saint Paul writeth to the Romans—that Jesus shall pray for us, and that he is gone into heaven to appear in the presence of God for us. The same he writeth to the Hebrews—the which presence may He grant us to behold, who liveth and reigneth world without end. Amen."

holiest activity, and be alone. The Saviour often went apart. He withdrew even from the closer circle and nearer fellowship of his chosen ones, and sought seclusion and separation. And no man has ever done anything great in God's church, who has not nurtured his faith and piety in deep retirement. It was not that Wycliffe had no felt or full idea of the claims of his age, that he now paused in his course. Like a man who steps backward to accelerate the spring and augment the bound of his next leap, he turned aside to gather strength, and brace up his spirit for something more resolute and more daring. Being a man of faith, he was a man of purpose; and to effect his purpose, he threw himself on the resources of infinite wisdom and love. He was in communion with God, and believing that he was moving in harmony with His will, he challenged every opposing force.

CHAPTER III.

DISSATISFACTION WITH ECCLESIASTICAL AFFAIRS.

Wycliffe's controversy with the Mendicants—His promotion—Disputes in which he was involved—His appeal to the pontiff—His rising and widening influence—Is probably known to the court—His embassy to Rome.

THOUGH founded in the sixth century, it was not till the middle of the tenth that the monastic orders put forth in England any very positive symptoms of life and energy. Dunstan, their leader and apologist, was a man of most commanding abilities; and pretending to have received a Divine revelation in their favour, exerted his great talents and influence on their behalf. Their professed separation from the world, with their severer discipline and purer life, raised them high in public esteem. Nor can it be denied, that amidst the intellectual torpor and inactivity of the Middle Ages, the monastery offered the best retreat for letters and for learning, and, in many instances, proved

the school of a stern and lofty virtue. We lose nothing by admitting, in common with the most eminent Protestants and Romanists, that but for the ecclesiastical hierarchy, Europe had in all probability become the prey of tyrants, or the theatre of perpetual wars, or had been reduced to a barren desert; that the hierarchy not only opposed the progress of despotism in Europe, but preserved the elements of civilization, and upheld in the recollection of men that which is so easily effaced—the ties which bind earth to heaven. But did not the hierarchy itself become a despotism? Was ever despotism more crushing or more destructive? Did not a supreme selfishness become the infecting genius of every order of the priesthood? The monks laid aside their severer habits, and gave themselves up to indulgence and personal aggrandizement. Wealth and luxury converted the monasteries into so many “castles of indolence.” The ambition and avarice of the cathedral budded and blossomed, and bore their deadly fruits beneath the shade of the convent. Abuses multiplied daily. The people were scandalized and indignant. The demand for a change was loud, and all but universal. At this crisis, “the papacy, environed by adversaries, and presenting so many vulnerable points, accepted with gladness the services of an order, which promised to exhibit to the world an image of primitive simplicity and self-denial. In them

the pontificate would be provided with a hardy and devoted militia, thoroughly prepared for all the various exigencies of her warfare. On the one hand, she would be effectually guarded against the hostility of princes, and on the other, against the encroachments of heresy. The most ample and honourable privileges were, accordingly, lavished on those fraternities which made a voluntary abjuration of property, and whose members were ready to disperse themselves throughout Christendom, relying for their support on the alms of the faithful, and for their influence on the example of an austere, laborious, and ascetic life. For a considerable time, the new institution did its office to admiration. The effect was like the transfusion of fresh life-blood into a decaying system. The genius of the institution penetrated quickly into every department of ecclesiastical agency, whether high or low, whether obscure or eminent. It intruded itself into the region of parochial duty; it seated itself in the confessional; it seized on the chair of the university; it grasped the crosier of episcopacy; it held the seals of civil office, and the portfolio of diplomatic intrigue; till, at last, it appeared probable that the confidence and veneration of nearly the whole Catholic world would be transferred from their established guides to these professors of primitive sanctity and perfection." *

* Le Bas, pp. 83, 84.

It was in the beginning of the thirteenth century, that there arose this new religious order of the Mendicants, or begging friars, who professed to abjure all property or settled revenue, and to depend for their support on the charitable contributions or voluntary offerings of the faithful. It was pope Innocent III., himself irreproachable in private life, and deeply alive to the vices of the priesthood, who first instituted this order, and distinguished it with special marks of his protection and favour. The Mendicants rendered important service to the church, and continued to enjoy the patronage and support of succeeding pontiffs. The esteem in which they were held by the highest dignitaries so tended to multiply their numbers, that they began to swarm in all the states of Europe, till they became obnoxious to the people and burdensome to the church. To repress their growth and influence was now an object to be desired. With this view, Gregory X., in a general council which he assembled at Lyons in 1272, reduced them to the four orders of the Dominicans, the Franciscans, the Carmelites, and the Hermits of Saint Augustine. The power of the first two orders far surpassed that of the other two. They were, in fact, prior to the Reformation, what the Jesuits have been since that memorable change—the very soul of the hierarchy, determining all political affairs and all ecclesiastical movements.

These four mendicant orders had liberty to travel at pleasure—to mingle in any circle—to take on themselves the education of the people—and began to assume a position and a pre-eminence but little consistent with their original professions of humility and self-denial. This was the natural consequence of the esteem and veneration in which they were held, as well as of the enthusiastic attachment with which the people adhered to them. They busied themselves in temporal and political affairs of the greatest moment, “in composing the differences of princes, concluding treaties of peace, concerting alliances, presiding in cabinet councils, governing courts, levying taxes,” and doing many other offices not only remote from, but absolutely inconsistent with, their more sacred character and profession. Nor was this all. They claimed superiority over every other order of the priesthood, and asserted that they had a Divine commission—that they enjoyed special intercourse with Heaven—that to them was revealed the true method of obtaining salvation, and hence the people should receive the sacraments from their hands alone, and should commit their souls to the care of none other. Encouraged and succoured by the pontiff, they usurped the office and invaded the privileges of the conventual clergy.* According to

* Fox, in his *Acts and Monuments*, gives the following statement from Fitzralph:—“I have, in my diocese of Armagh,

Matthew Paris, "they, with overbearing insolence, frequently inquired of the devout, by whom they had been confessed. And if the answer was, By my own priest, they replied, And who is that *ignoramus*? He never heard lectures in theology; he never gave his nights to the study of the decrees; he never learned to unravel knotty questions. They are all blind, and leaders of the blind. Come to us, who know how to distinguish leper from leper."* And to such a degree did they retain their credit and influence, that towards the close of the fourteenth century great numbers of both sexes sought admission into the orders, as the most infallible method of obtaining God's favour and of securing eternal life.

Though protected by pontifical authority from all opposition, whether more open or more secret, they began to be looked upon with growing suspicion and distrust. Even the illustrious Grosseteste, who had not only extended to them his patronage and support, but lavished on them his favour, was so impressed with their rapacity, pride, and ambition—with their

about two thousand persons, who stand condemned by the censures of the church denounced every year against murderers, thieves, and such like malefactors, of all which number scarcely fourteen have applied to me or to my clergy for absolution. Yet they all receive the sacraments as others do, because they are absolved, or pretend to be absolved, by friars."

* Matthew Paris, p. 608.

restless and turbulent spirit, as it manifested itself in various parts of the kingdom, that he denounced them as the heaviest curse of the church, and the greatest obstacle to the cause of Christian truth. In the prosecution of their itinerant labours, they forced their way into the foremost ranks of society, and into the centre of every circle; and though they bore the name and clothed themselves in the attire of friars-mendicant, they yet lived luxuriously, revelled in indulgence, and drained the poorest of the people for their own personal aggrandizement. "It is matter of melancholy presage, that within the four-and-twenty years of their establishment in England, these friars have piled up their mansions to a royal altitude. Impudently transgressing the bounds of poverty, the very basis of their profession, they fulfil to the letter the ancient prophecies of Hildegara, and exhibit inestimable treasures within their spacious edifices and lofty walls. They beset the dying bed of the noble and the wealthy, in order to extort secret bequests from the fears of guilt or superstition. No one now has any hope of salvation but through the ministry of the *preachers* or the *Minorites*. They are found at the court, in the character of councillors, and chamberlains, and treasurers, and negotiators of marriage. As the agents of papal extortion, they are incessantly applying the arts of flattery, the stings of rebuke, or the terrors of confession. They pour contempt on the sound

orders of Benedict and Augustine ; and, according to their estimate, the black-cowled brethren are as much superior to the monks, as the disciples of Epicurus would be to so many simpletons and boors."*

As Oxford was the first seat and residence of the Mendicants, so there the first vigorous opponent of their errors and their encroachments made his appearance.† Fitzralph, who was chosen chancellor of the university in 1233, fearlessly assailed the order, and laid bare their hypocrisy, ambition, arrogance, and the evil tendency of their doctrines, not only to the hierarchy, but to the general well-being of society. Their letters of fraternity were nothing less than indulgences, which they bartered and sold, whose benefits were multiplied and extended according to the wealth of the purchaser, and whose influence might reach beyond death itself. Such was the extortion practised by the order—such the positive pillage and robbery which they committed on the more credulous—that the reformer described their instruments of deception as “powdred with hypocrisie, covetise, simonie, blasphemie, and other leasings;” and such were the mean and sordid arts to which they had recourse to proselytize and

* Matthew Paris, p. 541.

† It was in 1221, that Gilbert de Fresney and twelve of his brethren settled in England, under the sanction of the founder of the Dominicans.

draw away the people from the more ancient clergy—such the licentiousness and the vices which they encouraged—such the low devices which they employed to withdraw the young from the university, that we wonder not that the chancellor should have treated them with the most caustic application. In the year 1357, Fitzralph fearlessly arraigned the whole order before the pope at Avignon. His “Conclusions,” published at the papal court, could not but be known to Wycliffe, whose soul burned with a just and holy indignation against the fraternity. In three short years after preferring his complaints, the archbishop died. His spirit, however, survived. The work of reformation passed into other and not less able hands. If the death of Fitzralph was regarded by his opponents as the triumph of their cause, the triumph was but short-lived. If for some years Wycliffe had not been so conspicuous on the field of action, he had only withdrawn to discipline and prepare himself for his next appearance. The crisis called for the man, and God, in his good providence, sent forth the man fitted for the crisis. The death of the archbishop left the reformer in the undisputed possession of the ground on which was to be conducted the great conflict between corruption and reformation. The principles of light and darkness, of good and evil, were now to be stirred to their very depth; and on the victory of the one or the other, depended the future weal or the future

woe of England. The appeal was to be made, not to the papacy, but to the people.

Though Wycliffe commenced his attack on the notorious and wide-spread abuses of this sanctimonious order as early as the year 1360, it was not till 1380 that he published his treatise, entitled "Objections to Friars," in which he assailed them as the pests of society, the enemies of religion, the patrons and the promoters of every crime.* These objections, which are arranged under fifty distinct heads or chapters, were but the accumulated and combined reasonings which the reformer had employed during the preceding twenty years. His writings abound with the severest invective against the life and practice of the order. His hatred of them never changed. His opposition to their conduct rather strengthened and became more inveterate. In the hour of sickness, even, he could not suffer them to escape. Being visited by a deputation from the body, who reminded him of the injury which they had sustained from his continued opposition and attacks, and who urged him to recant before his death, we are told that he heard them in silence; then, beckoning to his attendants to

* This tract, together with his petition to the king and the parliament, was printed in a small volume at the Oxford press, in 1608. Towards its conclusion, the reformer says, that "the friars been cause, beginning, and maintaining of perturbation in Christendom, and of all evils of this worlde, these errors shall never be amended till friars be brought to freedom of the gospel, and clean religion of Jesus Christ."

raise him in bed, and summoning all the strength he could command, he cried aloud—
“I shall not die, but live, and shall again declare the evil deeds of the friars.”

Their first establishment having been at Oxford, and the university being provoked by their continued and but too successful attempts to seduce her youthful members, passed a statute, in which it was provided that no one should be received into the fraternity of the Mendicants until he had reached the age of eighteen. The friars, however, were not to be deterred by any authority which did not proceed immediately from Rome; and Rome, instead of interposing her influence to arrest them in their progress, cheered them on in their course, and seconded their efforts with dispensations of a character which reduced the statute of the university to mere waste paper. All the wealth and all the influence of the order were employed to render abortive each of its provisions. The strife deepened and became yet more severe. The attitude of both parties grew more resolute and more warlike. In the heat of the contest, Wycliffe appeared as the champion of the ancient institutions, and the uncompromising antagonist of the friars. So firm was his bearing, and so important was the service which he rendered, that, in the year 1361, and in the midst of his reform movements, he became the subject of special promotion and honour. The

Society of Baliol College presented him with the church of Fellingham, a living of considerable value in the diocese of Lincoln,* and then conferred on him the dignity of warden. This he resigned four years afterwards for the same office in Canterbury Hall, to which he was raised through the enlightened and liberal friendship of the primate, Simon de Islip, a man no less distinguished for his profound learning than for his love of truth and his piety. In originating this foundation, the archbishop designed it for the benefit of eleven scholars, eight of whom were to be clerks or secular clergymen, and the other three, with the warden or master, were to be chosen from the monks of Christchurch, Canterbury. The headship was first conferred on a monk of the name of Wodehall, or Woodhall, whose restless and turbulent spirit had greatly disquieted the university, and proved a fruitful source of disorder. Having thrown the whole force and violence of his temper into the disputes which distracted and divided the sacred and the secular clergy, Islip availed himself of a provision in the institution, which empowered him to remove both the warden and the three monks associated with him; and in supplying their places with an equal number of secular scholars, invited our reformer to the vacant office of master, as

* This living he exchanged in 1368 for that of Lutgersal, or Lutgershall, in the archdeaconry of Bucks, of less value, indeed, but nearer to Oxford.

a man in whose honesty of life, in whose laudable conversation, and in whose knowledge of letters, as well as in whose fidelity, circumspection, and industry, he could implicitly confide. This was a stroke of consummate policy, but the appointment had little more than been perfected, when the primate was removed by death. Peter Langham, who had previously been a private monk, and abbot of Westminster, was translated from the see of Ely to that of Canterbury. His elevation was the signal for the downfall of Wycliffe. An appeal was preferred by Wodehall and his expelled associates to the new archbishop, and on the pretence that Islip had acted under the influence of misrepresentation, or in circumstances in which he was incompetent to form a rational decision, the monks were restored, and Wodehall reinstated in the office of master. Into the whole of this dispute it is not needful to enter. Suffice it to say, that Wycliffe, conscious of his own integrity, and assured that he had been raised to the wardenship in conformity with the provisions of the institution and the will of its founder, made his appeal to the pontiff. Pressed and perplexed with the difficulties which beset the question, the pope transferred its investigation to one of his cardinals. Its settlement was delayed and still put off. While the matter was thus pending, Wycliffe "could not be ignorant that the slightest indication of feeling hostile to the claims of the Roman prelates

would be marked by his opponents, and reported to the papal court with suitable comments and the darkest colouring. From December, 1365, to March, 1367, he had possessed his warden-ship; and from his part in the appeal to the pontiff, he must be supposed to have felt somewhat solicitous to preserve it. Had his spirit been capable of subjection to a little calculating policy, he would doubtless have abstained, at least for a while, from his attacks on a class of men known as the most effective agents of the papal power. It was, however, while this cause was pending, that the zeal of Wycliffe, as the enemy of corruption, whether in the head or the members of the hierarchy, became so far conspicuous as to attract attention from the highest authorities in the realm. His pen was still employed, and his voice was still heard, in defence of the university, opposing that independence of its laws which the popes had attempted in favour of the Mendicants; nor was he less active in the cause of the parochial clergy, whose flocks were frequently estranged from them by the influence of those more devoted ministers of the superstitions and of the despotic authority of Rome."*

It is again needful to refer to the historical fact that John had basely surrendered the British crown to pope Innocent III. England was the vassal of Rome. It is true that the act

* Vaughan's Life of Wycliffe, vol. i. pp. 277, 278.

of homage had been on the part of the sovereign constantly and carefully evaded, that the annual tribute to the holy see had been frequently interrupted, that for more than thirty years it had not been paid at all, and that the people had ever been impatient under the iron bondage of a foreign yoke. Still, the pope claimed supremacy, and, in the year 1365, Urban v. preferred his claim to the annual feudal acknowledgment of one thousand marks, together with all arrears for the three-and-thirty years preceding. In default of payment, the monarch was admonished that he would be cited by process to appear before the sovereign pontiff. It was not to be expected that a daring spirit like that of Edward III. would ever submit to be the slave of the church and court of Rome. His conduct was such as became the prince of a mighty people and a growing empire. He not only declined the tribute, but, in the following year, appealed to his parliament for the settlement of a question in which the honour of the nation was so deeply and immediately involved. Happily for the future freedom and independence of the country, both houses were unanimous in maintaining that neither John nor any other prince had power thus to subject the realm of England without consent of parliament; that not only had such consent never been obtained, but that the king, in so acting, had violated his coronation oath. The nobility and the people ranged themselves

on the side of parliament, and stood pledged to support the cause of the monarch against the pretensions and the claims of the pontiff.* Yet there were men mean enough, and sycophantic enough, to betray their country to the pontifical claim. They dreamed, as others had dreamed before them, that the civil power should ever be in subordination to ecclesiastical authority ; and to insure this subordination, they were prepared to enter into conflict with every opposing force. Resenting the doctrine of the parliament, an anonymous monk took up the defence of the papal claim ; but not satisfied with putting himself in the attitude of defence, he threw down the gauntlet, and challenged to a closer fight the force and fire of England's purest intellect. His aim was to draw our reformer into the arena, and by putting him in opposition to pontifical authority, render him obnoxious to the holy see. Nothing intimidated, and still trusting to the righteousness of his cause, Wycliffe accepted the challenge, and undertook to prove, in opposition to this monastic apologist, that the sovereignty of England had never been forfeited to the pope, and that the clergy were not, either as individuals or as communities, exempt in

* The words in which the legislature embodied their mind were the following :—" Forasmuch as neither king John, nor any other king, could bring this realm and kingdom in such thralldom and subjection, but by common consent of parliament, the which was not done ; therefore, that which he did was against his oath at his coronation. If, therefore, the pope should attempt anything against the king by process, or other matters in deed, the king, with all his subjects, should, with all their force and power, resist the same."

person and property from subjection to the civil power. As the controversy involved the whole question of the pontiff's temporal authority, and as this authority was so intimately blended with his spiritual power, our reformer was careful to guard himself at the very outset against the imputation of unfaithfulness to the church. Nothing was further from his thoughts at this time than the intention to damage her or her interests in the estimation of her own children. He was simply the opponent of proud and undue pretensions—the irreconcilable foe of existing and deepening corruption. Nor can we overlook the fact, that by this time his fame as one of the ablest disputants of the age must have been fully established. He was challenged, not by a friar, but by a member of the monastic order, between whom and the friars there had hitherto been anything but a feeling of brotherhood or of good will.

The grand proposition of the monk was this:—That all dominion granted under a condition is, by the violation of the condition, dissolved; that the lord pope granted to our king the realm of England, under the condition that England should annually pay seven hundred marks, and three hundred for Ireland, which condition has, from time to time, been disregarded; and therefore the king of England has long since fallen from the sovereignty of England. In his reply, Wycliffe maintained:—

1. That the sovereign is the supreme head of the state in things civil and ecclesiastical, and therefore has the right, in connexion with the parliament, not only to deny the tribute claimed, but even to alienate the property of the church. This doctrine he affirmed to be in conformity with law and the ancient practice of the realm.

2. That if in certain aspects this doctrine was at variance with certain ecclesiastical canons, it was yet in accordance with the claims of natural right, the maxims of civil law, and the teachings of the book of God.

3. That as first and "chief in the following of Christ," who had not where to lay his head, the pope's influence should be limited to his spiritual functions, and all civil homage denied him; that the influence of the pontiff and his cardinals had rather been to the detriment of the nation's religious life and privileges; that the conditions on which John first granted the disputed tribute were never agreed to by the people; that if it was paid for the benefit of personal absolution, or for the removal of the interdict laid upon his kingdom, it involved the head of the church in the sin of simony, since no man is permitted to barter spiritual blessings for temporal gain; that if the pontifical claim were not founded on the fact of spiritual benefit conferred, the despotism now imposed on the

church might come in the course of time to press with equal force on the state, and the crown itself be looked upon as at the disposal of the Roman see; that if the property was ever the fair possession of his holiness, the goods of the church could not be lawfully disposed of without an adequate compensation, and surely the rich and broad lands of England were not to be given up for the paltry annual rent of seven hundred marks; that if the pope could thus far alienate the property of the church, he might dispose of it entirely; that if there is to be any superior lord or sovereign above the monarch, he must be no other than Christ himself; that the pope is a man, liable like other men to sin, and while in mortal sin, is, according to the doctrine of the divines, unfitted for dominion; that the stipulation of the late king, as affecting the interests of the whole people, could never be held as either valid or binding; that never having been made by the kingdom, the kingdom could never descend to recognise it; that the agreement obtained the sanction and the seal of only the monarch and a few of his apostate nobles, and that it was injustice to punish their sins on the liberties and the possessions of their posterity.

Such was the ground taken and successfully maintained by our reformer in dealing with his masked and monastic opponent. According to Lingard, the treatise in which Wycliffe

embodied his reasonings and conclusions, "does more honour to his loyalty as a subject, than to his abilities as a scholar or divine." It was neither scholarship nor divinity which was required in conducting this controversy. A simple collation of facts, and the legitimate inductions from those facts, were all which he deemed necessary to satisfy any honest mind; but his capacity and force of address in the treatment of the subject are not to be depreciated. Starting with the proposition that the condition on which John surrendered his kingdom to the Roman see, was in itself essentially dishonest, he proceeds, by a process of sound argumentation, to lay bare the fraudulent ambition and ever-advancing encroachment of the papal power, till he comes to set forth its pretensions as a vain thing, and concludes by saying—"If I mistake not, the day will first arrive in which every exertion shall cease, before the doctor [the anonymous monk] will be able to establish that a condition such as this can ever be consistent either with honesty or with reason."* These sentiments and reasonings did but re-echo the decision of the English parliament, which had previously come to the resolution, that neither king John nor any other sovereign had power thus to subject the

* Wycliffe's answer to his monastic opponent is still extant in the form of a Latin Theological Determination, and is printed in Lewis's life of the reformer, with the title—" *Determinatio quædam Magistri Johannis Wycliff contra unum Monachum*," pp. 349—360.

realm of England without consent of the legislature, and that such a surrender was nothing short of a violation of the coronation oath. And when the Mendicant controversy was subsequently submitted to the same august assembly, it was resolved that, in conformity with the Oxford statute, no university scholar under the age of eighteen should be received into the order; that no document tending in any way to the damage of the national seminaries should be hereafter received from the pope, and that all future differences between the parties should be decided in the civil courts, and without further appeal. What share Wycliffe had in conducting the defence of Oxford it is impossible to say. That he was so engaged is highly probable. Nor is it less probable that it was owing to the conspicuous and successful part which he played in this controversy, that he became the object of royal favour, and was elevated to the rank of *peculiaris regis clericus*, or king's private chaplain—a distinction this not more honourable to the priest who received it than to the prince who conferred it. About seven years afterwards, he was one of a commission appointed by the same prince to proceed to Avignon, where pope Gregory xi. then resided, and treat with him about certain papal provisions against which the English parliament had recently passed several laws and resolutions. The fact that in this royal commission the name of Wycliffe stands second, is incon-

trovertible proof of the estimation in which he was held at court, and of the high reputation which he had acquired in connexion with the ecclesiastical questions and movements of his day. But to this we shall have occasion to refer at a more advanced point of our biographical sketch.

It is worthy of remark, that the simple circumstance of the Mendicants having laid claim to a closer correspondence to Christ and his apostles in their humility, self-denial, and devotedness, led at once to an appeal to the Scriptures as the highest and last authority. The friars themselves having been the first to challenge this appeal, they had no alternative but to abide by the decisions of this Divine standard. In the majority of instances, judgment went against them. Not only did they fail to approach their great Model, but their life exhibited a perfect contrast. Amidst all their pretensions, they had no claim to be classified with "the poor in spirit," or with the meek of the earth. They were men of pride and worldly ambition, and hence their novel pretensions were easily determined, and as quickly repudiated. But more and better than this, homage was done to the Bible. The authority of inspiration was placed before the authority of an institution—the voice of God was heard above the voice of the church. The very appeal to the book implied the sufficiency of Scripture

in all matters affecting faith and practice, and the right of each individual man, in the exercise of his own private judgment, to determine what is or what is not in conformity with the mind of God. Wycliffe had the deep consciousness that the principles which he had espoused, and now maintained, were in harmony with the spirit of a free Christianity, and every successive appeal to the Christian Testament strengthened his attachment to those principles. It was not in the spirit of faction, but from the force of an interior Divine life that he spoke and acted. With his mind under the influence of simple living truth, he could no more have pursued a different course, than a planet, obedient to the great central law of attraction, could wander from its appointed orbit. His aim was not the overthrow of the church as a sacred institution, but its purification and corresponding vitality. As the more skilful or experienced practitioner will have recourse to amputation only when life is more or less in danger, so the reformer wished to apply the knife only to those members of the body ecclesiastical which impaired the vital functions, and impeded the full development of the structure. He was all alive to the evils from within and from without which now threatened the church. He foresaw that either she must be purified, or fall beneath the weight of her own corruption. The failure of Fitzralph to effect a reform left little, if any room, to hope that the spirit of improvement would take its

rise from within, and therefore Wycliffe appealed to the people, and both appealed to the Bible. It may be that our reformer did not foresee whither his inquiries were conducting himself and the country. He was in advance of the age, as every man must be who would impress his age with some new element, and carry it forward in the march of progress and improvement. The fact that his own mind was possessed of a living principle, was the grand qualification for his undertaking the regeneration of the church and of society. If his own soul had not been quickened by the Spirit of life, he could not have acted with living power on the people.

CHAPTER IV.

MARKED PECULIARITY OF OPINIONS.

The reformer's favourite doctrine—Is shown to be in error—
Becomes professor of divinity—Examination of his theological system—His successive promotions—Is accused of teaching dangerous opinions—Is required by the pope to renounce his peculiar tenets.

THE historical reader will bear in mind, that during the reign of the third Edward, not only did the prelates of the church enjoy equal dignity with the greatest barons of the kingdom, but that to them were intrusted the chief departments of government; while, as a body, the ecclesiastics of that day so entrenched themselves in their sacerdotal character and privileges, as openly to challenge exemption from all secular or civil jurisdiction. Such exemption would have been fatal to the liberties and the independence of England. The very idea was repudiated by the king and his parliament. In 1371, that assembly demanded the exclusion of all persons in clerical orders from offices of state. Whether they were moved to this step by the secret influence of John of Gaunt matters little. One

thing is certain, that with this illustrious nobleman our reformer was on terms of great intimacy, and both were of opinion that it was a thing altogether incongruous, that men avowedly consecrated to the work of the Christian ministry should be so absorbed in the management of affairs purely secular. Encouraged and supported by his patron, the duke of Lancaster, Wycliffe set himself to expose and denounce the evil. Though the abuse existed as a deep-rooted custom, and was sanctioned by an aspiring and ambitious priesthood, he spared it not. With a courage which bespoke the strength of his principles and the depth of his piety, he demanded that the ministers of religion should give themselves wholly to their sacred calling, and leave the offices of state to be filled up from among the ranks of the laity.

The man who dared to complain that "prelates and great religious possessioners are so occupied in heart about worldly lordships and with pleas of business, that no habit of devotion, of praying, of thoughtfulness on heavenly things, on the sins of their own heart, or on those of other men, may be preserved—neither may they be found studying and preaching of the gospel, nor visiting and comforting of poor men," could hardly hope to escape the deep resentment of his own order. He was misunderstood, misrepresented, and charged with sowing the seeds of dissension and of civil

discord. Strong in the righteousness of his cause, he faltered not, neither wavered. His reasonings and his teachings were giving an impression to the mind of the country. The parliament had already petitioned the sovereign; the sovereign was prepared to take the advice of his council; spiritual functionaries began to vacate their secular offices; and it was recognised as a principle that the government of the kingdom should be restricted to the laity.

How it came to pass that the king, after conferring on the reformer the rank and dignity of royal chaplain, after nominating him as one of the commissioners to negotiate with the delegates of the pontiff as to the limits of the papal influence within the kingdom of England, and after bestowing on him other marks of his princely favour, should have agreed to the pope's edict by which Wycliffe was formally excluded from the wardenship of Baliol College, it is difficult to say. Whether the assent of Edward and of the ecclesiastical court was secured by bribery, or by any other unfair means, must be left undetermined. We have simply to do with the fact. The preferment, which had been so honourably bestowed on Wycliffe, was now as dishonourably wrested from him. Not that he courted preferment, or was in quest of the wealth which an advanced ecclesiastical status might bring with it. He looked on promotion and influence as means to

an end. He depreciated nothing which could facilitate his movements in the work of reformation. In 1372-3, he took his degree of doctor in divinity, and was soon afterwards raised to the chair of theology in the first and leading university of the kingdom. Perhaps it would be more proper to say, that "he now publicly professed divinity, and read lectures in it. This he did with great applause, having such an authority in the schools that whatever he said was received as an oracle."

It is somewhat remarkable, that the man who wrote and laboured to restrict the duties and offices of government to the laity, should have held the doctrine of "dominion founded on grace." Great efforts have been made by some of his biographers to screen him from this charge. By some it is held needless to inquire whether he could for a moment have regarded it as expedient to become the abettor of any doctrine unfriendly to the influence of the civil power, since among the voluminous works of the reformer one only has been cited as really containing this dogma; and even in his English compositions—which were by far the greater number, and which alone were addressed to the people—it is not in more than two or three instances that the remotest indication of it occurs. By others it is admitted that the maxim of dominion being founded on grace, although fanatical and anarchical in its

tendency, is yet to be found in a work of the reformer's, entitled *Triologus*. They contend, however, that it is expressed in a very moderate and guarded manner, and that it amounts to nothing more than this, that, "as Christ, by the title of original righteousness, was master of all the possessions of the world, even so, all things belong to the just by the grace and favour of Christ; further, that as the law of Christ forbids his disciples to contend for temporal things, however clearly and rightly their own, then with this title of grace they must rest content; and since they must on no account enforce their right by any worldly means, the lords of the earth may hear, with great composure, a claim to all the good things in it, if accompanied by a law which positively forbids the claimants to take a single step towards realizing their visionary right." This is an apology, not a defence. Even a modern biographer is at a loss for an argument, when he says, "Such was the faith of Wycliffe with regard to the mediation of Christ, that he considered every man as indebted to the grace of the Redeemer for the benefits of this world, no less than for the hope of a better; and accordingly, he viewed the sin which incurred the forfeiture of heaven, as separating the offender at the same moment from all claim, with respect to God, as to the honours or possessions of the earth. Such is the theology of the Scriptures. But it is insinuated that the reformer proceeded

from this general statement to infer, as a general consequence, that every such delinquent might be divested of property or office by the saints, as of things forfeited with respect to the supreme Lord. Could the rector of Lutterworth be shown to have adopted such a conclusion, it must have been in some moment of derangement. We are not dependent, however, on such a supposition. When this scene of probation shall reach its close, it will appear that the doctrine of Wycliffe, however much despised or calumniated, is a momentous truth, and that no dominion can have the element of duration but what is founded in grace; and though it was not his manner to blend the retributions of a future world with the arrangements peculiar to the present, he might deem it important to admonish the worldly and the powerful as to the ground on which the adjustments of that great crisis will take place; assuring them that the delay of those fearful decisions which will then be announced, arose less from any legal impediment than from the long-suffering of God."*

It would be far better, we think, to admit that the reformer had taken up a false position, and that the premiss being wrong, it vitiated all his reasonings and all his conclusions. His mind was not fully enlightened on all points, and hence there are certain things, both in his writings and in his procedure, which, when viewed in the clearer light of the nineteenth

* See Vaughan, vol. ii. pp. 233, 236; and Le Bas, pp. 265, 266.

century, admit of no satisfactory solution. The mere fact of a man in the act of regeneration passing over from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, can never lay the claim for earthly possessions and temporal dominion. In virtue of his filial relation to God, the Christian has a peculiar property, and a satisfaction altogether his own, in everything that is. Not only does he enjoy all things in God, but all things are his, for he is Christ's, and Christ is God's:—

“ He looks abroad into the varied field
Of nature, and though poor, perhaps, compar'd
With those whose mansions glitter in his sight,
Calls the delightful scen'ry all his own.
His are the mountains, and the valleys his,
And the resplendent rivers. His t' enjoy
With a propriety that none can feel,
But who with filial confidence inspir'd,
Can lift to heav'n an unpresumptuous eye,
And smiling, say—‘ My Father made them all !’
Are they not his by a peculiar right,
And by an emphasis of int'rest his,
Whose eye they fill with tears of holy joy,
Whose heart with praise, and whose exalted mind,
With worthy thoughts of that unwearied love,
That plann'd, and built, and still upholds, a world
So cloth'd with beauty for rebellious man ? ”

Nor do we forget that when this lower creation shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God—when the restitution of all things shall have taken place—when the Saviour shall have put down all rule and all authority and power, and shall have delivered up the kingdom to the Father, “ that God may be all in all ”—when the new heavens and the new earth, wherein

dwelleth righteousness, shall have appeared, and the new Jerusalem come down from God out of heaven, and the tabernacle of God be with men, and God himself be with them and be their God, that to them will be given dominion and power, and they will reign with Christ for ever and ever. But this is wholly independent of present possession and of present rule. Here, in all likelihood, lay the error of our reformer. He confounded a reign of saints on earth with their final reign in glory. And by admitting this simple inaccuracy in judgment and opinion, we get free of all the difficulty connected with his doctrine of dominion founded on grace.

On his elevation to the theological chair of Oxford, he was introduced into a position of almost incalculable importance. His prelections were listened to with eagerness and with interest. He was engaged in quickening the minds of those who were destined, in the arrangements of Infinite wisdom, to move and act in the midst of other and still wider circles. He had the future teachers of the nation at his feet. His lectures were to become the embodied and living utterances of many a pulpit; nor can we doubt that, between his academical instructions and his more popular compositions, there was the most perfect and unbroken harmony. Many of the scholastic pieces which he read from that chair are still extant, but his exposi-

tion of the Decalogue, which dates from about this period, is entitled to special notice, as furnishing the best compendium of his views at this interesting period of his history.

If dependence be a necessary condition of creation, then both creation and dependence carry with them the corresponding idea of law. That which is created cannot be independent. It must be subject to the Creator. In other words, it must be under law. Now, what is the universal law of moral being but that which the Decalogue reveals? If its sum and substance can be resolved into supreme love to God, and corresponding love to our neighbour, then there is no portion of God's universe exempt from its obligation. It is the law of heaven as well as of earth. The only difference is to be found, not in the principle of the law, but in the mode of fulfilling it. In consequence of his fallen condition, the position and circumstances of man differ from the position and circumstances of a pure spirit that has kept his first estate. This difference does not release man from the law of his being, nor can the law be lowered and modified in its claims to meet the exigency of his case. Let the change be what it may which takes place in the creature, the law remains the same—unchanged and unchangeable. If the law is violated, it has its penalty and its punishment. These must fall on the transgressor, or some method of forgiveness

and reconciliation must be revealed for his relief in harmony with the requirements of law itself. If these views be correct and true, then it was the part of consummate wisdom and piety in the reformer to undertake the exposition of that moral code; which could not fail to lead him into the very centre of evangelical truth and discovery, by shutting man up as the breaker of law to the one Divine method of justification and acceptance through an appointed and all-sufficient Mediator.

In his commentary on the Decalogue, he not only deplores the listlessness of man to the lofty claims and requirements of religion, but sets forth in the strongest colours those sins which stand opposed to the supreme homage and love of the Creator; he treats the all but universal practice of swearing and oath-taking with the most caustic severity, and with the most solemn earnestness; he inculcates the observance of the sabbath by specifying the exercises of private meditation, public worship, and the works of a pious charity; he brings out the principles on which honour is due to parents and to all superiors; he expounds the injunction, "not to kill," as not only prohibiting the taking away of life, but as interdicting any attempt to damage the character and stain the reputation of another; he deals with the sins of the flesh, with lust and vice in every form, as only a man could do who was con-

scious, in the deep recess of his own heart, of that inward purity which is one of the grand qualifications for the world of perfected spirits; and then concludes thus:—"Many think if they give a penny to a pardoner, they shall be forgiven the breaking of all the commandments of God, and, therefore, they take no heed how they keep them. But I say to thee, for certain, though thou have priests and friars to sing for thee, and though thou each day hear many masses, and found charities and colleges, and go on pilgrimages all thy life, and give all thy goods to pardoners—all this shall not bring thy soul to heaven. While, if the commandments of God are revered to the end, though neither penny nor halfpenny be possessed, there shall be everlasting pardon, and the bliss of heaven." Practical, however, as was the character of his religion, he was far from manifesting any spirit of dependence on his own works, as a ground of acceptance before God.

It may be that his views were neither so wide nor so matured at this period as they were some years later, still it is refreshing to find what prominence he gave to the cross of Christ, and how tenaciously he adhered to the perfection of his sacrifice as an atonement for sin. He uniformly spoke of the church as the purchase of the Saviour's blood, and of the necessity for the dependence, by a living faith, of every sinner on Christ's merits alone for remission of

sins and eternal life. The constant aim of his teaching was to take the man away from the outward and the ceremonial, to the inward and the spiritual; from the priest to Christ; from the sacrament to the atonement; and leave him in the presence of a righteous God with nothing but that atonement on which to adventure his soul and his everlasting interests. Through the efficacy of the cross had the harmony of his own moral and spiritual nature been restored, and therefore did he beseech men to be reconciled unto God. He felt that he could never sufficiently exalt the merits of that Sacrifice which had been offered once for all, and whose remedial power is for ever the same. In his exposition of the law, he thus writes:—"Be-think thee heartily of the wonderful kindness of God, who was so high and so worshipful in heaven, that he should come down so low, and be born of the maiden, and become our brother, to buy us again, by his hard passion, from our thralldom to Satan. He was beaten, and buffeted, and scourged, so that there was not left a whole spot of his skin, but all his body was as one stream of blood. He was crowned with a crown of thorns for despite; and when the crown, as some writers say, would not set fast down to his head for the long thorns, they took staves and beat them down, until the thorns pierced the place of the brain. He was then nailed, hand and foot, with sharp nails and rugged, that his pain might be the more, and so

at last he suffered a painful death, hanging full shamefully on the hard tree. And all this he did and suffered of his own kindness, without any sin of himself, that he might deliver us from sin and pain, and bring us to everlasting bliss. Thou shouldst also think constantly, how, when he had made thee of nought, thou hadst forsaken him, and all his kindness, through sin, and hadst taken thee to Satan and his service, world without end, had not Christ, God and man, suffered this hard death to save us. And thus see the great kindness, and all other goodness, which God hath shown for thee; and thereby learn thy own great unkindness; and thus thou shalt see that man is the most fallen of creatures, and the unkindest of all the creatures that ever God made. It should be full sweet and delightful to us to think thus on this great kindness, and this great love of Jesus Christ." Like the great apostle of old, the love of Christ constrained him. From the cross he drew all the mightiest motives by which to enforce a life of practical holiness:—the strongest incentives to obedience and perseverance, the highest impulses of love and zeal, the purest inspirations of hope and joy, the warmest and most enkindling flame of devotion and of praise.

To return to our narrative. The fact of his occupying the divinity chair of Oxford, did not remove Wycliffe from the arena of contest.

He was but getting into the heat of ecclesiastical strife. The statutes of provisors and præmunire, passed in 1350, though meant to act as an effectual check on papal usurpation, had produced but little effect.* The provisions of the holy see were pressed to a point at which the power of endurance was no longer possible. Deep and ominous were the murmurs which came up from the depth of the nation's burdened heart. To silence these murmurs, Edward sent an embassy to the papal court, to convey to Gregory XI., who then filled the papal chair, the impression which his conduct had made, and to put it before him as the claim of the English people, "that the pontiff should desist from the reservation of benefices in the Anglican church; that the clergy should henceforth freely enjoy their election to episcopal dignities; and that it might be sufficient, in the case of electing a bishop, that his appointment should be confirmed by his metropolitan, as was the ancient custom." So little disposed was the

* The first of these statutes declared "the collation to any dignity or benefice, in a manner opposed to the rights of the king, the chapters, or its patrons, to be void—subjecting the parties concerned in every such offence to fine and imprisonment, and prohibiting appeal, beyond the court of the sovereign. The second statute was directed against the growing custom of transferring questions in relation to property from the decision of the English courts to the re-judgment of the pontiffs—exposing all such offenders in future to heavy fines, and to imprisonment at the king's will. The rigorous enforcement of the latter provision was highly beneficial; but, from many subsequent facts, it is evident that the former imposed but a feeble check on the evils which it was intended to remove."—Vaughan, vol. i. pp. 334, 335.

head of the Roman Catholic church to grant any concession, and so limited was his measure of relief, that the parliament, in conformity with a petition laid upon the table of the house, passed a law against the provisions of the pope, in which they declared the election of bishops to be wholly independent of the papal sanction. An inquiry was then instituted into the exact number and value of the alien benefices in the Anglican church. Armed with this information, a second embassy, including our reformer, was sent to the pope. It was arranged that the meeting of the delegates should take place, not at Avignon, where Gregory resided, but at the far-famed city of Bruges. The negotiation was continued through two long years. And in what did it result? That for the future, the pope should desist from the reservation of benefices; but with this proviso, that the king should no more confer them by his writ! What a mockery! Well might our reformer burn with righteous indignation. He returned to England, not only dissatisfied, but with his mind more than ever impressed with the corruptions of the church. What he saw and learned during those two years he turned to the most practical account. His soul was filled, as it were, with a fresher and a purer inspiration, and he was more than ever resolved to prosecute the work to which he believed God had called him. Pope, prelate, and friar, now came under his severest castigation. He had no sympathy

with their vices and their wrong-doing: his soul had no desire to come into their secret. On the contrary, he kept himself at the greatest possible distance, that by increased purity and holiness he might be the better qualified to act the part of a practical reformer. If, in taking this manly attitude, he fell in the estimation of a secular and worldly-minded hierarchy, he proportionally rose in the esteem of all the pious and the good—in the esteem of his country and his sovereign. Either while he was still abroad, or immediately after his return home, he was presented by the king to a prebendal stall in the collegiate church of Westbury, in the diocese of Worcester; and shortly afterwards he was nominated by the crown to the rectory of Lutterworth, in the county of Leicester. Whether he now left the city and the chair of Oxford for the parish and the pulpit of Lutterworth, it is not easy to determine. All that is certainly known is, that at the latter place he spent the larger portion of his time in the duties of a most exemplary and unwearied pastor. His ministry told with quickening and edifying effect upon his parishioners, while in that scene of comparative retirement his own soul was getting into deeper communion with God—into still closer contact with the spiritual and the invisible. Of his strong devotional feeling there is abundant evidence; a living faith in Christ was the spring of his devotion, and if faith

determined the character of his devotion, it was by prayer that he nourished both his faith and fortitude. Depending on the resources of Omnipotence, and appropriating to himself the promises of Infinite Love, he felt that he was equal to any duty and to any conflict.

The hour of conflict came. On his return from Bruges in 1376, the duke of Lancaster, owing to the age of the king and the impaired health of the heir-apparent, became charged with the administration of the kingdom. But such was the state of parties, that the peculiarity of his position involved him in corresponding difficulties. On the death of Edward and the accession of his grandson Richard II., the country was involved in a war, the expenses of which, together with a want of economy in the administration, had entirely exhausted the royal treasury, and in the same proportion had so ruffled the public temper, that the murmurs of the people daily became deeper and more emphatic. All parties felt that something must be done to relieve the country in its extremity, and at the same time to repress the risings of popular discontent. The source of the evil was traced to the luxury, extravagance, and malpractices of the leading members of the hierarchy. The pope was held guilty of enriching himself by the reversion of benefices ; of accepting bribes for the promotion of unlearned and unworthy men to the cure of souls, who never

saw nor cared to see the flocks ; of levying a subsidy from the whole English clergy for the ransom of Frenchmen as the avowed enemies of the king ; of making a gain by the translation of bishops and other dignitaries within the realm ; and of appropriating to himself the first-fruits of all benefices. Lay patrons, taking advantage of the simony and covetousness of the pope, were accused of selling their benefices. The pope's collector and receiver of his pence not only kept a house in London, with clerks and officers thereunto belonging, as if it had been one of the king's solemn courts, but annually transported to the papal see twenty or more thousand marks. Cardinals, and other aliens retained at the court of Rome, were raised to the highest offices and dignities within the realm. On these grounds, it was represented to parliament, that it would be good to renew all the statutes against provisions from Rome, since the pope reserved all the benefices of the world for his own proper gift, and had within one single year created twelve new cardinals, thus raising the number to thirty, while all of them, with two or three exceptions, were the known enemies of the king. It was further suggested, that the provisors of the pope should be most strenuously resisted, and that no papal collector or proctor should remain in England upon pain of life and limb ; and that no Englishman, on the like pains, should become such collector or proctor, or remain at the court of Rome.

The parliament which entertained such views and sentiments was opposed to the administration of Lancaster, and in the beginning of the year 1377 a new parliament was convened, more attached to his principles and his policy. But John of Gaunt was the friend and patron of John of Wycliffe; and in order to reach the former through the latter, objection was now taken, for the first time, to the doctrine of the reformer, as involving tenets which loudly called for the interference of the civil power. Through the intermeddling activity of Courtney, who had been lately raised to the see of London, our reformer was cited to appear before his ecclesiastical superiors, to answer certain charges touching his erroneous and heretical doctrines. The place appointed for hearing his defence was St. Paul's Cathedral, which was so densely crowded with the populace, that it was with difficulty that lord Percy, as earl marshal, and even the duke of Lancaster himself, could procure an avenue of approach for the accused reformer. These two noblemen, the most powerful subjects of the crown, entered the court with Wycliffe as his avowed friends. This called forth the indignation of Courtney, the presiding judge in the case. No very temperate altercation ensued between the parties, and a scene, which it would be difficult to describe, was witnessed. Wycliffe was a silent spectator. But to such a height did feeling and passion rise, that the disputants were com-

pelled to separate, and the prosecution was delayed. The report of what had taken place within the cathedral was eagerly caught up by the multitude without, who, siding with the prelate against Gaunt and Wycliffe, were led into acts of violence and spoliation. "The palace of the Savoy, the most magnificent in the kingdom, was assailed by a band of rioters, and the arms of the duke, its owner, reversed as those of a traitor. The property of lord Percy suffered less ; but a clergyman, mistaken for the earl marshal, was slaughtered by the mob. In these proceedings, the mayor and aldermen appear to have been in some degree implicated. They are said to have been removed by the influence of the duke, that their places might be supplied by persons who were deemed more worthy of confidence."*

In the month of October, was assembled Richard's first parliament. Its composition indicated that the influence of Lancaster was on the decline. Though invited to become the president of a council of twelve peers, which was to be appointed to confer with the lower house on the business before it, the duke refused to take any office or perform any act till some imputation which had been lately cast upon him were removed, and he were assured of obtaining the most severe enactment against the authors of any such calumnies for the future.

* Vaughan, vol. i. p. 357.

His triumph was complete. The first business of the parliament was to provide against the encroachments of the ecclesiastical power, and to lighten those burdens which had been entailed on the nation by a long-continued and disastrous warfare. It was, therefore, submitted as a question, whether, in case of necessity, and as the means of self-preservation, it might not be lawful in a kingdom so to detain its treasure, although in express opposition to papal authority, and on the pain of censure or excommunication, that it should not be conveyed to foreign nations. The solution of the question was referred to our reformer. Abandoning the legal ground altogether, he made his exclusive appeal to the principles of the law of Christ.

The following passage is memorable and worthy of record :—" Christ, the Head of the church, whose example should be followed by all Christian priests, lived upon the alms of devout women. He hungered, thirsted, was a stranger, and suffered in many ways, not only in his members, but in himself. As the apostle testifies, he was made poor for your sakes, that ye, through his poverty, might be enriched. Accordingly, when the church was first endowed, whoever among the clergy were then holders of any temporal possessions, held the same in the form of a perpetual alms. This is evident from histories, and from other writings. Hence St. Bernard, in his second book to the pope

Eugenius, declares that no secular dominion could be challenged by him on the ground of his office, as the vicar of St. Peter, and writes thus:—‘It may, indeed, be claimed by you, in virtue of some other plea, but assuredly by no right or title derived from the apostles; for how could an apostle give unto you that which he did not himself possess? That care over the church which he really had he gave you; but when did he give you any worldly rule or lordship? Observe what he saith—‘Not bearing rule as lords over God’s heritage, but yielding yourselves as examples to the flock.’ And that ye may not think these words spoken in a show of humility, and not in truth, mark the words of our Lord himself in the gospel:—‘The kings of the nations have lordships over them, but it shall not be so with you.’ Here lordly dominion is plainly forbidden to the apostles; and wilt thou venture to usurp the same? If a lord, thine apostleship is lost; if an apostle, thy lordship is no more; for certainly the one or the other must be relinquished. If both are sought, both shall be lost. Or, shouldst thou succeed, then judge thyself to be of that number respecting whom God so greatly complains, saying—‘They have reigned, but not through me; they have become princes, but I have not known them.’ And if men will keep that which is forbidden, let us hear what is said:—‘He who is greatest among you, shall be made as the least, and he who is the highest shall be

your minister ;' and to illustrate this saying, he set a child in the midst of his disciples. This, then, is the true form and institution of the apostolic calling—lordship and rule are forbidden, ministration and service are commanded. From these words of a blessed Man, whom the whole church hath agreed to honour, it appears that the pope has no right to possess himself of the goods of the church, as though he were lord of them ; but that he is to be, with respect to them, as a minister or servant, and the proctor for the poor. And would to God that the same proud and eager desire of authority and lordship, which is now discovered by this seat of power, were aught else than a declension, preparing the pathway of Antichrist!"

The validity of this document has been disputed, as also the fact whether the parliament ever referred the matter to the judgment of the reformer. We confess that we see no reason to dispute either the one or the other ; and certainly Wycliffe could not publish such sentiments, and yet hope to be treated with impunity by the see of Rome. The man who maintained that the pope's temporal supremacy was a gross usurpation—that all ecclesiastical property is held conditionally, or for certain specified purposes, and that it is the duty of the magistrate to confiscate the temporalities of the priest who habitually abuses them—that no ecclesiastic, however exalted, can either by his benedictions

or his anathemas impart either good or evil, except as these are in conformity with the law of Christ—and that the highest dignitaries, not excepting the supreme pontiff, may be lawfully corrected by their inferiors—could not fail to be obnoxious to the see of Rome. We therefore find, that on the 22nd of May, 1377, pope Gregory addressed a bull to the archbishop of Canterbury and his lordship of London, directing them to cite Wycliffe before them, in order to answer for his conduct. Another bull, bearing the same date, was sent to the king, requesting his favour and assistance in the business; and a third was despatched to the university of Oxford, desiring them to withdraw their protection from a man who stood accused of heretical teaching and contumelious conduct. Before these letters had reached England, (having been, from some unknown cause, delayed till the month of November,) his majesty Edward III., as we have found, had gone down to the grave; Richard, a child of eleven years of age, occupied the throne; and Lancaster, though he had been reassured of the confidence of parliament, no longer ruled in the cabinet. Sudbury, now archbishop of Canterbury, wrote to the chancellor of Oxford, reminding him of the papal mandate, and demanding his written judgment on the doctrines and practices of the reformer. The chancellor moved with caution, and shrank from the responsibility of committing Wycliffe

to the mercy of his enemies. Towards the close of December, the primate issued his mandate for the appearance of the rector of Lutterworth before his ecclesiastical superiors in the church of St. Paul, on the thirtieth court-day from the date of citation. Early in the following year, Wycliffe, attended by a crowd of citizens, among whom his opinions prevailed, and who now espoused his cause, appeared before an ecclesiastical synod convened in the archbishop's palace at Lambeth. No sooner had they entered the place, than the demonstration of popular feeling on behalf of the accused was such as to throw the court into consternation and alarm. The scene was still further heightened by the arrival of sir Louis Clifford, with a message from the queen-mother, positively forbidding the court further to proceed with the cause. Again defeated in the attempt to seize the person and repress the opinions of the reformer, we are informed by Walsingham that the delegates, "shaken as a reed with the wind, became soft as oil in their speech, to the open forfeiture of their own dignity, and the injury of the whole church ;" and Wycliffe left the court with a simple admonition to abstain for the future from the publication of his opinions, that the laity might not be made to stumble by his perversions. "But the mind which had learned to view the spiritual weapons of the church as powerless, except when employed according to the teaching of holy writ,

was not to be dismayed by them as directed against conclusions which had been adopted as the result of much painful and devout investigation." The injunction of the court fell pointless and blunt on the ear of the reformer. Not that he was disposed to trifle with established authority, or that he wilfully put himself in opposition to his superiors, but simply because he was committed to a work of inestimable moment, and the abandonment of which would have been unfaithfulness to God.

CHAPTER V.

REFORMATION PRINCIPLES.

Papal influence in England at this crisis — Parliamentary enactments—Spread of Wycliffe's opinions—His views of the papal authority—Claims of the hierarchy—Ghostly assumption—Origin and effects of the papal schism.

THE supremacy of the pope has ever been regarded as the key-stone in the great extended arch of the papacy. Remove this, and the whole thing falls to pieces. Subject the ecclesiastical to the civil power, and leave the propagation and support of Romanism to its own inherent life and energy, and it is found comparatively innocuous. The force of Christian truth is sufficient to overcome every form of superstition and error. A spiritual Christianity can gain nothing by an appeal to the sword. There is no conceivable connexion between mental conviction and physical coercion. The two things are absolutely antagonistic. Human steel can never be put in the room of the Divine Spirit. It is just as the governments of this world befriend and patronise Popery, that it

dares to come abroad, and lift its head in the light of heaven. In proportion to its influence in the state, is its capacity for self-propagation and extension; and what, in other circumstances, it could not even attempt, it is then prepared to enforce. Armed with an authority which none might dispute, it has turned the keenest edge of the magistrate's sword against the disobedient. Where it could not command the homage of the inward spirit, it has punished and tortured the outward man. The history of papal supremacy is the history of suffering and of blood.

To aim a blow at this supremacy was to lay the axe to the root of the tree. More than convinced of the evils arising out of this proud usurpation, Wycliffe devoted his most strenuous efforts to undermine the basis on which it rested. Nor can he be said to have been either unwarranted or premature in adopting this line of action. The church had raised herself above all law. The hierarchy claimed universal empire and universal possession. The priest of Rome was held to be "the master of the emperor—the fellow of God—the Deity on earth!" Wycliffe was, therefore, justified in saying:—"Commonly, the new laws which the clergy have made, are cunningly devised to bring down the power of lords and kings, which God ordained, and to make themselves lords and to have all things at their doom. Certainly, it seemeth that these worldly prelates

would more completely destroy the power of kings and lords, which God ordained for the government of Christian men, than God destroyeth the power even of the fiend. For God, in setting a term which Satan may do, and no more, still suffereth his power to last, for the profit of Christian men, and the just punishment of evil doers. But these worldly clerks would never cease, if unchecked, until they had destroyed kings and lords, with their regalia and power. . . . For the prelates of this world, and the priests, high and low, say freely, and write in their law, that the king hath no jurisdiction nor power over their persons, nor over the goods of holy church. And yet Christ and his apostles were most obedient to kings and lords, and taught all men to be subject to them, and to serve them truly and cheerfully in bodily works, and to fear them, and honour them above all other men. The wise king Solomon, also, put down a high bishop, who was unfaithful to him and his kingdom, and exiled him, and ordained a good priest in his room, as the book of Kings telleth. And Jesus Christ paid tribute to the emperor, and commanded men to pay him tribute. St. Peter also commandeth Christian men to be subject to every ordinance of man, whether unto the king as more high than others, or unto dukes, as sent of him to the vengeance of evil doers, and the praising of good men. Also, St. Paul commandeth, by the authority of God, that every soul be subject to

the higher powers, for there is no power but of God. Princes are not to the dread of good works, but of evil. Wilt thou not dread the power? Do good, and thou shalt have praise of the same; for he is God's minister to thee for good. If thou hast done evil, assuredly thou shouldst fear, for he beareth not the sword in vain. Therefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience. For therefore ye give tribute, they being the ministers of God serving to this same thing. Therefore yield ye to all men's debts; to whom tribute, tribute; to whom toll, toll; to whom dread, dread; to whom honour, honour. Our Saviour Jesus Christ meekly suffered a painful death under Pilate, not excusing himself from that jurisdiction by virtue of his office. And St. Paul professed himself ready to suffer death by the doom of the emperor's justice, if he were worthy of death, as the deeds of the apostles teach. And Paul appealed to the heathen emperor, from the priests of the Jews, to be under his jurisdiction, and so to save his life. Lord, who hath made our worldly clergy exempt from the king's jurisdiction and chastening, since God hath given kings this office over all misdoers? Clerks, and particularly high-priests, should be most meek and obedient to the laws of this world, as were Christ and his apostles; and thus be a mirror to all men, that they may yield this meekness and obedience to the king, and to his righteous laws. What sturdy rob-

bers and traitors, then, are these to lords and kings in refusing this obedience, and in thus giving an example to all the men of the land to become rebels against the king and the lords! For in this, and in what they teach, they instruct the commons of the land, both in words and deeds, to be unfaithful and rebellious against the king. And this seemeth well, according to their new law of decretals, where proud clerks have ordained that our clergy shall pay no subsidy nor tax, nor anything for the keeping of our king and our realm, without assent from the worldly priest of Rome. And yet many times this proud worldly priest is an enemy of our land, and secretly maintaining our enemies in war against us with our own gold. Thus an alien priest, and the proudest of all priests, they make the chief lord over the whole of the goods which clerks possess in this kingdom, and that is the greater part thereof. And where are there greater traitors, either to God or holy church, and especially to our liege lord and his kingdom? An alien worldly priest, and an enemy to us, is made chief lord over the greater part of our country!"*

The sentiments which he thus exposed were enunciated and defended in England towards the close of the fourteenth century, by men who looked upon the doctrines of our reformer with apprehension and fear for the stability of the

* Sentence of the Curse Expounded, ms. c. 3, 6, 11.

church and the safety of the commonwealth. Wycliffe, clearly discovering, as every man who would open his eyes to the facts of the case might have perceived, that the principles against which he contended were subversive of all civil and social order, fatal to the freedom, the interests, and the happiness of the individual subject, the stability of the throne, and the life of the sovereign—was man enough and Christian enough, not only to enter his most solemn protest, but to breast the darkest storm that might burst upon him in opposing such boundless pretensions. He not only spoke of the pope as an Antichrist—not only continued to assert the subordination of the ecclesiastical to the civil power—not only maintained the authority pertaining to secular lords with respect to the temporalities of the church, and that not the mitre but the crown should constitute the final appeal in determining the application of ecclesiastical property; but falling back on the decision of parliament, that the procuring of any benefice by papal provision should be punished with outlawry—that the same penalty should be incurred by the man who should farm any of the livings in the Anglican church that had been conferred upon foreigners—that the pope should be prevented making reservations to dignities elective, as being against his treaty with Edward—that all aliens should within a given time quit the realm, and that during the war all their lands and goods should be

applied thereto—he took advanced ground, and advocated a radical change in the whole ecclesiastical system. His recent visit to the papal court had given him a deeper insight into its corruption. His very soul loathed and turned away from the injustice and the abominations which were practised under the sacred name of piety. His voice waxed louder and still more earnest for reform. The time, however, was not yet. He stood rather as the herald of the coming deliverer—the seer of a future and more glorious epoch.

His opinions rapidly spread among the people. The citizens of London, who stood aloof from him at St. Paul's, and put themselves in the attitude of antagonists, were seen rallying round him at Lambeth. The evils which he laid bare with so much freedom and fidelity were so notorious, and the usurpations which he denounced were so unjust and so monstrous, that the most incredulous and the most stolid could not fail to be impressed. Nor was the impression confined to the metropolis. It extended to the provinces. It passed the narrower limits of the kingdom, and was felt as deeply in some parts of the continent as in England itself. Long had the best of men been degraded and enslaved. A despotism more crushing than the most cruel oppression had broken and bruised them. That despotism was in its height and power. England

must resist it, or she might become unto perpetuity the vassal of Rome. The assumptions and the excesses of the hierarchy had produced such a deep and general disgust, that the people every day became more determined to withstand the encroachments of a body, which seemed to live and act only to enrich and aggrandize itself by exhausting the resources of the country. The most sacred interests of religion were sacrificed to the pride of ambition. From the pontiff down to the humblest priest that ministered at the altar, all ranks of the clergy were infected with a worldly, selfish spirit. On this point, the testimony of the reformer is most explicit. Touching the pope, he says:—"Let him not be ashamed to perform the ministry of the church, since he is, or at least ought to be, the servant of the servants of God. But a prohibition of reading the sacred Scriptures, and a vanity of secular dominion, and a lusting after worldly appearances, would seem to partake too much of a disposition toward the blasphemous advancement of Antichrist, especially while the truths of a Scriptural faith are reputed tares, and said to be opposed to Christian truth, by certain leaders who arrogate that we must abide by their decision respecting every article of faith, notwithstanding they themselves are plainly ignorant of the faith of the Scriptures. But by such means there follows a crowding to the court (of Rome,) to purchase a condemnation of the sacred

Scriptures as heretical, and thence come dispensations, contrary to the articles of the Christian faith." Of his estimate of these indulgences we may form some faint idea, when we hear him exclaiming:—"These, opposed to the Scriptures of truth, like the crimson blossom of foul revenge, provide sustenance for Antichrist. Of this the infallible sign is, that there reigns in the clergy a Lucifer-like enmity and pride, consisting in the lust of domination, the wife of which is covetousness of earthly things, breeding together the children of the fiend—the children of evangelical poverty being no more. A judgment of the fruit thus produced may be formed also from the fact, that many, even of the children of poverty, are so degenerate, that either by what they say, or by their silence, they take the part of Lucifer, not being able to stand forth in the cause of evangelical poverty; or not daring, in consequence of the seed of the man of sin, sown in their hearts, or from a low fear of forfeiting their temporalities." These utterances, which ought to have flashed like lightning across the conscience, revealing to the priesthood their guilt and condemnation, fell with electric force upon thousands of the community, and lifted them into the manly attitude of defence. Their sympathies were stirred to their lowest depth, and with the reformer they were prepared rather to die in the conflict than yield those liberties which they held dearer than life.

That by which the priesthood wrought more effectually on the superstition and the fears of the people, was the dogma that their sentences of excommunication extended to the future state. To pretend that they had power beyond this life to visit the sins of men—that they could raise and lower at pleasure the temperature of purgatorial fire—that they could either lengthen or shorten the term of punishment—above all, that their sentence might run out into everlasting torments—was to clothe themselves with a power before which the most stout-hearted might well have trembled. Nor could a more subtle snare have been laid for the souls of men. Every individual member of the church was thus in the hands and at the mercy of the priest. Hence the plea for confession and absolution. Absolution depends on confession, and confession brings the offender in prostration to the feet of his ghostly superior, with a submission and a dependence which never can be due from one creature to another. So impressed was Wycliffe with this fact, that he laboured with great solicitude and with growing earnestness, to deliver men from what he conceived to be nothing inferior to the bondage of corruption. He not only disputed, but positively denied the power here assumed. His words are :—“ Let it once be admitted that the pope, or one representing him, does indeed bind or loose whenever he affects to do so, and how shall the world stand? For if, when the

pontiff pretends to bind all who oppose him in his acquisition of temporal things, either movable or immovable, with the pains of eternal damnation, such persons assuredly are so bound—it must follow, among the easiest of things, for the pope to wrest unto himself all the kingdoms of the world, and to subvert or to destroy every ordinance of Christ. And since, for a less fault than this usurpation of a Divine power, Abiathar was deposed by Solomon, Peter was reproved to the face by Paul, nay, and many popes have been deposed by emperors and kings—what should be allowed to prevent the faithful uttering their complaints against this greater injury done to their God? For, on the ground of this impious doctrine, it would be easy for the pope to invert all the arrangements of the world; seizing, in connexion with the clergy, on the wives, the daughters, and all the possessions of the laity, without opposition, inasmuch as it is their saying, that even kings may not deprive a churchman of aught, neither complain of his conduct, let him do what he may, while obedience must be instantly rendered to whatever the pope may decree!”

The power to bind or to loose being thus denied to the supreme pontiff, we wonder not to find the reformer calling in question his authority to confer that power on the inferior priesthood :—“ We know that it is impossible

that the vicar of Christ, merely by his bulls, though concurring with his own will, and that of his college of cardinals, should really qualify or disqualify any man. This is evident from that point of catholic doctrine which requires our Lord, in every vicarious operation, to maintain the primacy. Therefore, as in every qualifying of a subject, it is first required that the subject to be qualified should be meet and worthy of it; and as, also, in every act of disqualification, there must first be some demerit in the person disqualified requiring it; it follows, that the act of qualifying is not simply from the ministry of the vicar of Christ, but from above, or from some other cause." He proceeds further, and asserts, that "then only does a Christian priest bind or loose, when he simply obeys the law of Christ; because it is not lawful for him to bind or loose, but in virtue of that law; and, by consequence, not unless it be in conformity to it."

Tyranny may have its rule, but justice eventually has its reign. The rod of oppression must yield to the sceptre of righteousness. The triumph may be delayed, but it is not the less certain. The husbandman must first labour before he partake the fruit. The hero must first take the field before he can proclaim a victory. Close was the conflict in which Wycliffe was engaged, and mighty were the issues involved in that conflict. The advanced ground,

which he assumed brought him into direct collision with the concentrated power of the hierarchy, and that power employed every expedient, even the meanest and most unworthy, to reduce and overcome his influence. The infliction with which, at this moment, he might have been visited, was happily averted by the breaking out of the great schism of the west, which so enfeebled the papal power in England, and everywhere else, as to leave very little of either strength or disposition to proceed to extremities against its avowed enemies.

The death of Gregory xi. in 1378, rendered vacant St. Peter's chair. The cardinals assembled to elect his successor. The honour which had for so long a period been confined to Frenchmen the Romans were resolved should be now transferred to an Italian. The election fell on Bartholomew di Pragnano, a Neapolitan by birth, and then archbishop of Bari, who assumed the name and title of Urban vi. But having soon fallen in the esteem of all parties, some of the leading cardinals retired from Rome to Anagni; and at Fonde, a city of Naples, they chose a successor to Gregory, who was immediately proclaimed as Clement vii. Thus there were two popes at one and the same time; and though England adhered to Urban, so involved did the Roman see become in internal strife and faction, that our reformer was allowed to go on for years, preaching and writing with little, if

any molestation. Availing himself of this period of respite from the fury of his enemies, he assailed the sins of the hierarchy with augmented force, and proclaimed it as a fit occasion for all the princes and potentates of Christendom to combine in overthrowing the entire superstructure of the Romish dominion. In the division created by the election of two popes, he believed that Christ had cloven the head of Antichrist, and made the two parts fight against each other.

Under the pressure of his numerous duties, and the force of great mental anxiety, the health of the reformer became so sensibly impaired as to threaten a speedy dissolution. He was then at Oxford, the scene of his former labours, and in the midst of the order which he had condemned aloud. From the four orders of friars, four doctors were deputed to wait on the dying man, receive his confession, and urge him to revoke whatever he had said or published tending to the injury of the church, and especially of those holy fraternities which they represented. Wycliffe had nothing to revoke, and no confession to make. He felt assured that his sickness was not unto death, and the four regents left his room with the painful impression, that should he be raised up again, their orders could not expect for the future any gentler treatment at his hands.* He recovered,

* See page 41.

and as the tide of health returned and flowed, he addressed himself with deeper earnestness to the work of reformation. He first published his tract on the "SCHISM OF THE POPES,"* in which he adverts to the division in the hierarchy—to the degeneracy of the clergy, through the accumulation of wealth—to the necessity of a more equal and righteous application of ecclesiastical property—to the superstition which had clothed the priesthood with such mysterious power—to the priestly pretensions as the assumptions of human weakness or of human folly—to their anathemas as pointless—to confession as not essential—to the power of the keys as not derived from Christ—and to dominion over disembodied or departed spirits as the grossest imposition on the credulity of an overcredulous people. The schism thus created in the body-ecclesiastic became a frequent topic in all his subsequent writings, and even in his pulpit addresses. His aim was to undermine the influence of the priesthood. He believed that Simon Magus never laboured more in the work of simony than did the priests; and he gave it forth, that "God would no longer suffer the fiend to reign in only one such priest; but, for the sin which they had done, made division among two, so that men, in Christ's name, might the more easily overcome them both."

* The tract is entitled—"De Papâ Romano, or Schisma Papæ,"—and is still preserved in ms. in Trinity College, Dublin.

This was a consummation which he devoutly wished, and for this he more than ever lived, and wrote, and laboured.

The principles from which he acted were those which ultimately carried the Reformation of the sixteenth century. But that great organic change was delayed till the nations were riper for it. Just as our Lord never performed a miracle till the mind of the individual on whose behalf it was to be performed was brought to a certain stage of faith, so events linger in the rear of Providence till men are prepared and qualified to apprehend and appreciate them.

CHAPTER VI.

MINISTERIAL AND LITERARY LABOURS.

Wycliffe as a parish priest—His estimate of the Christian ministry—His mode of preaching—His efforts to correct the errors and disorders of the church—Desiderates the printing-press—His tracts and manuscript discourses—His translation of the Scriptures.

If human progress in Divine knowledge must consist in more correctly understanding and more completely appropriating the treasures of knowledge and wisdom which are in Christ, we discover the necessity of a standing ministry in the church, to expound the truth of God, and bring that truth into more direct and frequent contact with the conscience. The Saviour's doctrine was not to be propagated as a lifeless stock of tradition, but as a living and spiritual revelation, adapted to rouse susceptible minds, to quicken thought, and develop the life of God in the soul. Hence, when He ascended, leading captivity captive, and received gifts for men, "he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work

of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." A holy, unsecular, and properly qualified ministry, is essential to the true health and well-being of the church. If the pulpit give forth the simple, living utterances of Christianity—if nothing be known there but Christ and him crucified—if man's state by nature, as a lost and guilty sinner, be faithfully pointed out—if no veil be drawn over the cross to hide its glory—if there be a true exhibition of the one great atonement as the only ground of acceptance with God—it can never be too conspicuous, or hold too high a place in the thoughts and estimation of the Christian people. It was when the altar was raised above the pulpit, that the cross became veiled, and the doctrine of the atonement was lost sight of and forgotten amid the manipulations and the mock-offerings of the priesthood.

The conversion of our Saxon ancestors is to be ascribed chiefly to the power of preaching, and this power we believe it is which, under the blessing of the Divine Spirit, is to regenerate, set free, and bless all the nations of the earth. In the fourteenth century, the exercises of public worship were little better than a mere mechanical occupation—an unmeaning repetition of the prescribed service of the mass-book.

The preaching friars were instituted as an order to supply the lack of oral instruction; but their ministry soon degenerated into cunningly devised fables, and tended to mislead the people on the most momentous of all interests. Impressed with these facts, and with the office of preaching as the most efficient means of quickening men's thoughts, and taking them away from the outward and the ceremonial in religion, to that which is inward and spiritual, our reformer never neglected or undervalued the ministrations of the pulpit. His estimate of the office may be inferred from the following positions, taken from a manuscript in the Bodleian Library:—

I.—The highest service that men may attain to on earth, is to preach the word of God. This service falls peculiarly to priests, and therefore God more straightly demands it of them. Hereby should they produce children to God, and that is the end for which God has wedded the church. Lovely it might be, to have a son that were lord of this world, but fairer much it were to have a son in God, who, as a member of holy church, shall ascend to heaven. And for this cause, Jesus Christ left other works, and occupied himself mostly in preaching; and thus did his apostles, and for this God loved them.

II.—Also, he does best, who best keeps the

commandments of God. Now the first commandment of the second table bids us honour our elders, as our father and mother. But this honour should be first given to holy church, for she is the mother we should most love, and for her, as our faith teaches, Christ died. The church, however, is honoured most by the preaching of God's word, and hence this is the best service that priests may render unto God. Thus a woman said to Christ, that the womb which bare him, and the breasts which he had sucked, should be blessed of God; but Christ said, rather should that man be blessed, who should hear the words of God, and keep them. And this should preachers do more than other men, and this word should they keep more than any other treasure. Idleness in this office is to the church its greatest injury, producing most the children of the fiend, and sending them to his court.

III.—Also, that service is the best, which has the worst opposed to it. But the opposite of preaching is of all things the worst; and therefore preaching, if it be well done, is the best of all. And, accordingly, Jesus Christ, when he ascended into heaven, commanded it especially to all his apostles, to preach the gospel freely to every man. So, also, when Christ spoke last with Peter, he bade him thrice, as he loved him, to feed his sheep; and this would not a wise shepherd have done, had he

not himself loved it well. In this stands the office of the spiritual shepherd. As the bishop of the temple hindered Christ, so is he hindered by the hindering of this deed. Therefore Christ told them, that at the day of doom, Sodom and Gomorrah should better fare than they. And thus, if our bishops preach not in their own persons, and hinder true priests from preaching, they are in the sin of the bishops who killed the Lord Jesus Christ."

His pulpit compositions, of which nearly three hundred have been preserved, consist chiefly of simple expositions of Scripture. They are all of a popular character, and though he loses no opportunity of rebuking the vices of the age, and of exposing the corruptions of the church, great prominence is given to the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, especially to the atonement of Christ and the work of the Spirit. Nor can we doubt that, from his high endowments and comprehensive intellect, he invested every subject on which he touched with all that was interesting and attractive. He had no common power of oral communication. Whether his rhetoric and his eloquence came up to our modern ideas of these arts, is a point of no moment. It is sufficient that he had an easy and effective mode of conveying his thoughts to others, and that his ministry acted with vital force, not only on the rural population of Lutterworth, but on the minds of

thousands scattered over the length and breadth of the land.

His labours were not confined to the pulpit. Domiciliary visits entered largely into his plan and execution of parochial duty. He was a man of deep sympathies. The cause of the poor and the afflicted lay near his heart; and to relieve the one, or comfort the other, yielded him high satisfaction. He was familiar with the home of poverty and the house of mourning. He shed the light and the lustre of his piety over every scene. Difficult as it is sometimes to deal faithfully with the human conscience, when we come into close contact with men, there is no proof that he ever compromised or kept back a single truth to insure their favour. His single object was to commend himself to God. While he depreciated none of the ordinances of Christ's house, he was intensely solicitous that no one should even infer from his teaching, that the due administration of the sacraments by priestly hands was all that was required to insure the acceptance of a sinner's soul. He conceived that there could be no greater heresy "than for a man to believe that he is absolved from his sin if he give money, or because a priest layeth his hand on the head, and saith, I absolve thee." He maintained that the state of the heart enters into all true repentance, and determines the condition of the man before God. There was no discrepancy

between his public ministrations and his private visitations. What he proclaimed aloud in the hearing of the living congregation, he whispered into the ear of the dying sinner. He had but one doctrine for the pulpit and for the closet, for the cottage and the mansion, for the peasant and the prince.

The seeds which had been sown by the papal schism were now beginning to yield a fearful harvest of error, corruption, and disorder. To clear the field of the church of this deadly fruit was next to impossible. To check its growth was all that could well be attempted or hoped. The real state of the professedly Christian community may be learned from the reformer's own words:—"It is known that Antichrist hath enthralled the church much more than it was under the old law, though then the service was not to be borne. New laws are now made by Antichrist, and such as are not founded on the laws of the Saviour. More ceremonies, too, are now brought in than were in the old law, and more do they tarry men in coming to heaven than did the traditions of the Scribes and Pharisees. One cord of this thralldom is the lordship claimed by Antichrist, as being full lord, both of spirituals and temporals. Thus he turneth Christian men aside from serving Christ in Christian freedom; so much so, that they might well say, as the poet saith in his fable the frogs said to the harrow—'Cursed be

so many masters.' For in this day Christian men are oppressed, now with popes, and now with bishops, now with cardinals under popes, and now with prelates under bishops, and now their head is assailed with censures—in short, buffeted are they as men would serve a football. But, certainly, if the Baptist were not worthy to loose the latchet of the shoe of Christ, Antichrist hath no power thus to impede the freedom which Christ hath bought. Christ gave this freedom to men, that they might come to the bliss of heaven with less difficulty; but Antichrist burdens them, that they may give him money. Foul, therefore, is this doing, with respect both to God and his law.

The law and judgments which Antichrist has brought in, and added to the law of God, mar too much the church of Christ. For with the stewards of the church the laws of Antichrist are the rules by which they make officers therein; and, to deceive the laity, Antichrist challengeth to be, in such things, fully God's fellow, for he affirms, that if he judgeth thus, his will should be taken for reason, whereas this is the highest point that falleth to the godhead. Popes and kings, therefore, should seek a reason above their own will, for such blasphemy often bringeth to men more than the pride of Lucifer. He said he would ascend, and be like the Most High, but he challenged not to be the fellow of God, even with him, or passing him. Most foul is the failure

and the sin of priests in this respect. As if ashamed to appear as the servants of Christ, the pope and his bishops show the life of the emperors, and of the lordly in the world, and not the living of Christ. But, since Christ hated such things, they give us no room to guess them to be the ministers of Christ. And so they fail in the first lesson which Paul teacheth in this Scripture. Lord! what good doth the idle talk of the pope, who must be called of men most blessed father, and bishops most reverend men, while their life is discordant from that of Christ? In so taking of these names, they show that they are on the fiend's side, and children of the father of falsehood. After Saint Gregory, the pope may say that he is the servant of the servants of God, but his life reverseth his name; for he faileth to follow Christ, and is not the dispenser of the services which God hath bidden, but departeth from this service to that lordship which emperors have bestowed. And thus all the services of the church, which Christ hath appointed to his priests, are turned aside, so that if men will take heed to that service which Christ hath thus limited, it is all turned upside down, and hypocrites are become rulers." To say that the church, in the state which Wycliffe thus boldly denounced, needed no regenerating and purifying process, would be much the same thing as to affirm that a heart most deeply stained with sin stood in no need of the blood of

sprinkling and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit. It was in danger of sinking and perishing beneath the weight of its own corruption.

Full of quickening truth as were the writings of the reformer, and mighty as he was found to be as an instrument of impression and of power, his influence was necessarily limited and confined. The art of printing was still a secret, and slow and imperfect were the channels for the communication of thought and the spread of intelligence. Years of time and labour were required to give circulation to those free utterances of mind, which, almost without an effort, can now be borne in a few hours, as on the wings of the wind, to the furthest and most retired hamlet of our land. In these latter days, the press is at once the great teacher and the guardian of the whole family of man. What it has accomplished for the freedom and the happiness of our race is a conquest which throws the victories of a hundred fields into shade and distance. If the press had been in operation during the Middle Ages, spiritual despotism could never have risen to such a height, nor have become so cruel and crushing in its character. Had Wycliffe possessed such an instrument at the moment when his soul and his pen were so pregnant with living truth, he would have stirred England—nay, Christendom itself—to its very depth, and made the city of harlots, seated high on her seven hills,

rock and reel from its centre to its circumference. In the absence of that mighty instrument, he did what he could. Nor is his work ever to be depreciated. It was introductory to a greater change; and a good thing it was that the change was not then effected. The Reformation of the fourteenth century would have been confined and insignificant compared with that of the sixteenth. Imperfect as was the later change, the earlier would have been still more defective. The purification of the church would have been less complete, and freedom from the superstition of the past less positive and real.

Wycliffe had no misgivings as to the issue of his cause. Conscious that he was in the path of right, he could patiently wait the development of events. With the progress of years, and having obtained wider views of the Divine procedure than were embraced in his tract on "THE LAST AGE OF THE CHURCH," it is not unlikely that he had by this time changed his opinion on the duration of time and the close of the world's history. Many cycles were yet to run. Evolutions which eternity concealed were still to be disclosed. A period of glorious development still awaited the race. Impressed with this fact, as more in harmony with the book of prophecy and the dispensations of Providence, he continued and even multiplied his labours. The Bible, which was written in Latin, was a sealed volume to the great body of the people.

A translation into English now became the object and the effort of the reformer. Attempts had been made at this before his time. Until the conversion of some Goths to the Christian religion, in the beginning of the third century, the Teutonic tribes had been acquainted with no other written language than the Runic characters, or the letters employed by the Goths and Danes chiefly for inscriptions upon monumental stones. To Ulphilas, bishop of the Mæso-Goths, belongs the high honour of adapting the Greek and Roman characters to his own language, and of producing, in this new and more perfect alphabet, a version of the Holy Scriptures. After him, the first Anglo-Saxon author of whom we have any certain information is Cædmon, who, in the seventh century, wrote a poem on the creation, the deluge, and other historical events included in the five books of Moses. In the following century, the Psalter was translated by Aldhelm, bishop of Sherborne, and Guthlac, the anchorite; and the Gospel of St. John by the venerable Bede. In the time of Alfred, there was produced a Latin copy of the Gospels, with a Saxon version interlined; and Alfred himself is said to have prefixed to his code of laws a translation of certain passages from the Mosaic writings, and was engaged in a version of the Psalter at the time of his death. Between the time of this illustrious prince and the Norman conquest, there were produced several translations of the

Gospels in both Latin and Saxon, with an epitome of both Testaments by Elfric, who did more than any other ecclesiastic to supply his countrymen with the book of God in their own language. After the conquest, there were rhyming paraphrases, metrical poems, historical verses, outlines of particular books, psalters, versions of the Gospels, and of some of the Epistles. From the translators of our own authorized version, we learn that in the fourteenth century John Trevisa rendered the Gospels into English, and "that many English Bibles in written hand were then in the possession of divers persons." Among these may have been included the version of Wycliffe. According to Baber:—"Englishmen were now beginning to be more attentive to their own tongue. Before the conquest, the popular language had been invaded by the Normanic. After that event, as the Norman lords increased in power, their tongue became the language of polished society, of the laws, and of the pleadings in the courts of judicature. Latin was used for the services of the church, and the general purposes of literature, and the Anglo-Saxon remained chiefly confined to the commonalty. In the thirteenth century, the popular language began in some degree to recover its rank; the nobles, and the higher classes of society did not, as heretofore, disdain to resort to it as a colloquial tongue; and original works, as well as translations from the produc-

tions of authors who had written in French, now began to appear in an English dress. But at this period it must be allowed our language was rough and unpolished, and those who wrote in it were authors who possessed few ideas of taste or elegance. In proportion, however, as the tyrannical power of the barons declined, and as the paths which led to honour and distinction became more open to commoners, the English tongue in the fourteenth century became more general, and its improvements were considerable. The accessions it had received, and the changes it had experienced, within the last three centuries, were at this period numerous and striking ; for our language, as it was now spoken by the noble and the learned, was considerably enriched by words borrowed from the Roman and French dialects, and much altered in its pronunciation, its form, and its terminations. Among the lower orders of the people, however, upon whom refinement makes but slow advances, English, with respect to its great mass, preserved more of its Saxon origin and phraseology. Such was the state of the vernacular tongue at the time in which Wycliffe wrote.* And the reformer judged rightly when he came to the conclusion, that he could not do a better service to his country, or to the church of God, than by giving the Scriptures to the people in their own tongue. Whether he executed the entire version himself, or

* Memoirs of Wiclif, pp. 36, 37.

whether he was assisted in his work by other pious and learned men, (that which they executed undergoing his revision,) is a point of little moment. There is reason to believe that the whole work was finished, and several copies transcribed and put in circulation, some years before the reformer's death. Some of these manuscript versions still survive, and are to be found, not only in our British Museum, university and college libraries, cathedrals, and other public buildings, but in the collections of private individuals—a clear proof this of the extent to which the task of transcription was carried, when so many copies of the work are found to exist, notwithstanding all the zeal and efforts of the papal power to repress its circulation.*

* Three editions of Wycliffe's New Testament have been printed in England:—one in 1731, by the Rev. John Lewis, minister of Margate; another in 1810, under the superintendence of the Rev. H. H. Baber, of the British Museum; and the third in 1841, in Bagster's English Hexapla. His version of the Old Testament still remains in manuscript. The announcement that the Rev. J. Forshall and Sir F. Madden, librarians of the British Museum, were engaged in preparing an edition to be issued from the university press of Oxford, awakened the expectation of the learned and pious throughout the land; but no such publication has appeared. Whether the project has been abandoned, we cannot say.

That our readers may judge of "the unrivalled combination of force, simplicity, dignity, and feeling, in the original," we subjoin the following extract:—

"And Marye seyde, My soul magnifieth the Lord.

And my spiryt hath gladid in God myn helthe.

For he hath behulden the mekenesse of his handmayden: for lo for this alle generatiouns schulen seye that I am blessid.

For he that is mighti hath don to me grete thingis, and his name is holy.

There were those who looked upon this undertaking with suspicion, and regarded its completion with any other than feelings of satisfaction. Lingard, the distinguished Roman Catholic historian, thus alludes to it:—"In proof of his doctrines, he appealed to the Scriptures, and thus made his disciples judges between him and the bishops. Several versions of the sacred writings were even then extant; but they were confined to libraries, or only in the hands of persons who aspired to superior sanctity. Wiclif made a new translation, multiplied the copies with the aid of transcribers, and by his poor priests recommended it to the perusal of their hearers. In their hands it became an engine of wonderful power. Men were flattered with the appeal to their private judgment; the new doctrines insensibly acquired partisans and protectors in the higher classes, who alone were acquainted with the use of letters; a spirit of inquiry was generated; and the seeds were sown of that religious revolution, which in little more than a century astonished and convulsed the

And his mercy is fro kyndrede into kyndredis to men that dreden him.

He hath made myght in his arm, he scatteride proude men with the thoughte of his herte.

He sette down myghty men fro seete, and enhaunside meke men. He hath fulfillid hungry men with goodis, and he has left riche men voide.

He heuynghe mynde of his mercy took up Israel his child.

As he hath spokun to oure fadris, to Abraham, and to his seed into worlds."—Luke i. 46—55.

4 nations of Europe.”* Such was the opposition of the hierarchy, that ten years afterwards, a bill was brought into the House of Lords to forbid the perusal of the English Bible by the laity. It was opposed by John of Gaunt; but in a convocation held in St. Paul’s, in 1408, it was enacted and ordained, that “thenceforth no one should translate any text of sacred Scripture, by his own authority, into the English or any other tongue, in the way of book, tract, or treatise; and that no publication of this sort, composed in the time of John Wiclif, or since, or thereafter to be composed, should be read, either in part or in whole, either in public or in private, under the pain of the greater excommunication, until such translation should be approved by the diocesan of the place; or, if the matter should require it, by a provincial council:—every one who should act in contradiction to this order, to be punished as an abettor of heresy and error.” This was four-and-twenty years after the death of our reformer; but the enterprise of the reformer himself was regarded by Knighton, who was a canon of Leicester Abbey, as a real calamity to the church and the people. His words are: “Christ delivered his gospel to the clergy and

* Lingard, vol. iv. pp. 266, 267. The historian speaks here of several versions of the Scriptures as then extant, but he refers, we presume, to the various translations of separate and individual portions of the inspired volume, rather than to any version of the entire book.

doctors of the church, that they might administer to the laity and to weaker persons, according to the state of the times and the wants of men. But this master John Wycliffe translated it out of Latin into English, and thus laid it more open to the laity, and to women, who could read, than it had formerly been to the most learned of the clergy, even to those of them who had the best understanding. And in this way the gospel pearl is cast abroad, and trodden under foot of swine, and that which was before precious to both clergy and laity, is rendered as it were the common jest of both. The jewel of the church is turned into the sport of the people, and what was hitherto the principal gift of the clergy and divines, is made for ever common to the laity."

Notwithstanding the impediments to its freer circulation, the version of Wycliffe found its way to all classes. Though proscribed by the church, it was as eagerly sought, and as eagerly read. Costly as was the purchase, it was cheerfully paid; and impending as was the danger, it was faced with manly courage. The Bible is the book of the people; and with the Bible in their hands, they will never submit to the tyranny of a spiritual despotism. Christ came to proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. Christianity, when received into the heart, sets free the whole man, introducing

him into the glorious liberty of the children of God—

“He is the freeman whom the truth makes free,
And all are slaves beside.”

You may fetter every limb, and confine the man within the dark walls of some lonely cell, but the spirit you can never bind—never limit. Nor are we afraid to trust the people with the Bible. Let but its principles and its truths take possession of their hearts, and they will prove the surest guarantees for their temporal and eternal welfare.

CHAPTER VII.

MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT.

Wycliffe the subject of an advanced religious life—His wider views of truth—Is dissatisfied with the hierarchy—Sees further into the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom—His opinions obtain among all classes—His followers rapidly multiply—Their character and influence.

THERE is a moral and religious experience common to the children of God. All being the partakers of a divine life, this life has its progress and development. In some, it may be more rapid and marked than in others ; but in all, the fruits of the Spirit will in due season be manifest. Now, just as the fruit will correspond with the tree, or the stream with the tountain, so the outward character will mark the inward spiritual condition. It will indicate not only the reality of that great spiritual change which is involved in regeneration, and in which all things become new, but also the depth and the power of the religious life. The life of God cannot be daily flowing into the soul, and yet there be no out-coming of this higher

vitality. It will seek expression and find embodiment.

Judging from the depth and intensity of the devotion which marked his riper years—from the character of his faith, which so emphatically determined the character of his devotion—from his attachment to the devotion of grace, as excluding all human merit from the ground of a sinner's justification—from his refined enjoyment of the consolations and pleasures of religion—and from the practical and uplifting tendency of his ministry—we must conclude that Wycliffe was at this time the subject of an advanced religious life. He could not spend so much time as he did in the culture of his own spirit, and in communion with God, without becoming a holier man. He grew in grace as well as in knowledge. We say not that he had attained, or was now perfect. The infirmities of our common humanity still attached to him. His feelings were not so subdued and softened—his temper was not so chastened—his charity was not so Christ-like, as could have been desired. But still he was emphatically a man of God. Much, too, that is less lovely and attractive in his character, must be put down to the age in which he lived, and the circumstances in which he was placed. Had he been of a meek and gentle spirit—all refinement and charity, he would not have been fitted for his times and his work. The forerunner of our Lord retired

into the wilderness, and there lived a life of abstinence and austerity ; but when he abandoned the solitude of the desert for the banks of the Jordan, and gathered the people in multitudes about him, what could be more severe than his reproofs and his condemnations ? In what uncompromising terms did he denounce the prevailing idea that theocratic descent, and ecclesiastical relation, and the observance of outward rites, were all that was required to insure a place in the new and heavenly kingdom. So long as his energetic reproofs and calls to repentance were aimed only at the common people, even the Pharisees probably would have listened with approval ; but the first assault upon their corrupt practices must have roused all their hatred and all their vengeance. So with our reformer. Had he attacked only the common faults and vices of men, he would have met with but little opposition ; but when he aimed at men in high places—at the head of the church, and at the church itself—he brought down upon himself their concentrated indignation and wrath. Still, we must not ascribe the bitterness of his spirit to mere revenge or retaliation. His language is rather the index to the depth and strength of his feeling. In proportion as his own religious life advanced, did his heart become yet more burdened and oppressed with the condition of the church. Her malady was fatal ; and there was no alternative but either to sacrifice a part,

or let the whole body perish. Nor can we wonder that in an age of ruder surgery, the operation should have been somewhat long and painful.

We may conceive that Wycliffe's daily and devout study of God's word first suggested the idea of his giving the Scriptures to the people in their own tongue, and that while he was engaged in the work of translation, his own mind became more powerfully impressed with Divine truth, rose into a higher sphere of light, and obtained wider and more correct views. His work "ON THE TRUTH AND MEANING OF SCRIPTURE," is the most distinct and systematic enunciation of his opinions on the freedom of the human conscience and the doctrines of a primitive Christianity.* If the translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular language of any people be one of the most effective means of establishing true religion in the country where that language is spoken, then it is but simple justice to assert that the Protestant element began to work, not in the sixteenth century, but in the fourteenth. Wycliffe asserted the sole supremacy of the word of God, and its sufficiency, in opposition to tradition and traditional authority; the right of

* Copies of this treatise are to be found in the Bodleian and in the library of Trinity College, Dublin. Fox, the great martyrologist, had a copy in his possession, and at one time proposed giving it to the world. How much has the world lost!

private judgment in contradistinction from the fixed and stereotyped interpretations of the church; the only headship of Christ against priestly assumption; the efficacy of the atonement apart from the sacraments; the force of moral obligation as opposed to indulgence, penance, and absolution. The soundness of his views may be inferred from his homilies. He says—"Men who love this world, and rest in the lust thereof, live as if God had never spoken in his word, or would fail to judge them for their doing. To all Christian men, therefore, the faith of Christ's life is needful, and hence we should know the gospel, for this telleth the belief of Christ As the palate of a sick man, distempered from good meat, maketh him to covet things contrary to his health, so it is with the soul of man when it savoureth not of the law of God. And as the want of natural appetite is a deadly sign to man, so a want of spiritual relish for God's word is a sign of his second death Men who are unjust and proud, and who rebel against God, may read their judgment in the person of Christ. By him they must needs be condemned, and most certainly if they continue wicked toward his Spirit to the time of their death. . . . There is no sin done, but what is against God; and the greater the Lord is, against whom the sin is done, the greater always is the sin. . . . We hold it as a part of our faith, that as our first parents had sinned, there must be atone-

ment made for sin, according to the righteousness of God. For as God is merciful, so he is full of righteousness. But except he keep his righteousness in this point, how may he judge all the world? . . . It is to speak lightly to say that God might, of his mere power, forgive this sin, without the atonement which was made for it, since the justice of God would not suffer this, but requires that every trespass be punished, either in earth or in hell. God may not accept a person, to forgive him his sin, without an atonement, else he must give free licence to sin, both in angels and men, and then sin were no sin, and our God were no God. . . . As man's nature trespassed, so must man's nature render atonement. An angel, therefore, would in vain attempt to make atonement for man, for he has not the power to do it, nor was his the nature that here sinned. . . . The person to make the atonement must be God and man; for then the worthiness of this person's deeds were even with the unworthiness of the sin. . . . Yet the passion of Christ was the most voluntary passion that ever was suffered. . . . He came to his suffering in a way to show his free will. . . . In Christ's passion were all things which could make it the more meritorious. . . . We should believe that Christ suffered not, in any measure, but for some certain reason; for he is both God and man, who made all things in their number, and so would frame his passion to answer to the

greatness of man's sin. Follow we then after him, in his blessed passion, and keep we ourselves from sin hereafter, and gather we a devout mind from him."

Holding these sentiments, he could tolerate sin neither in the individual man nor in the hierarchy. Every day he became increasingly dissatisfied with the ecclesiastical system, just because he was every day getting a deeper insight into the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom. The church is not a human organization, but a Divine institution, designed for spiritual purposes and ends. "When men speak of holy church, anon, they understand prelates and priests, with monks, and canons, and friars, and all men who have tonsures, though they live accursedly, and never so contrary to the law of God. But they call not the seculars men of holy church, though they live never so truly, according to God's law, and die in perfect charity. Nevertheless, all who shall be saved in the bliss of heaven are members of holy church, and no more. . . . Christian men, taught in God's law, call holy church the congregation of just men, for whom Jesus Christ shed his blood; and not mere stones, and timber, and earthly dross, which the clerks of Antichrist magnify more than the righteousness of God, and the souls of men." To bring back the church to its original Scriptural ideal and model, was the final end contemplated by

our reformer. It retained but little of its primitive simplicity and purity. It partook more of the temporal than of the spiritual. Its worship was converted into a gorgeous ceremonial, its ministry into a lordly priesthood, its institutes into profound mysteries, its easy and unencumbered machinery into an engine of deadly power. The tendencies of the times acted on Wycliffe as a constant pressure from without; nor can it be said that he had nothing within on which the worldly and secularizing spirit of his day might have taken hold. "Even the purest man who has a great work to do for any age, must be affected more or less by the prevailing ideas and tendencies of that age. Unless he struggle against it, the spirit of the age will penetrate his own; his spiritual life and its products will be corrupted by the base admixture." It follows that Wycliffe's was no ordinary conflict. He was the man of the age. The eyes of all England—of Christendom—were now fastened on him. On the part which he was to act depended, under God, the liberties and the happiness of the race. His was "an age of crisis, of isolation, of pains, and of throes;" but the throes were those which precede some mighty birth.

We do not for a moment imagine that every one who was friendly to ecclesiastical reform, or who sympathised with Wycliffe in his grand movement, implicitly received all his doctrines.

If every second man in the kingdom was of his sect, it was not because he had embraced his views on all points. It was enough to receive and favour any tenet of the reformer, to be classified with his followers. Still, the fact remains untouched, that his doctrines spread with amazing rapidity, and his disciples multiplied till they were to be numbered by thousands on thousands. All classes rallied round his standard. Among these, a conspicuous place is due to the duke of Lancaster, and his brother of Gloucester, the queen-mother, Anne of Bohemia as queen of Richard, Richard himself, several of the nobility, and many knights who favoured the gospel. It is more than probable that the illustrious Chaucer, the father of English poetry, was a Lollard; while at the head of the Lollard band stood Sir John Oldcastle, otherwise known as lord Cobham, a nobleman distinguished for his genius and military valour, and who had done good service to his country, but who having, at no little expense, distributed Wycliffe's writings, and for years maintained a number of his followers, was afterwards doomed to perish at the stake as the victim of an intolerant priesthood.

The seeds which the reformer had been so diligent in sowing for years past fell into a soil prepared and ready to receive them. In those seeds were the germs of life, which soon developed itself in corresponding activity. In

describing the new sect, Knighton asserts that, "like their master, they were too eloquent, and too much for other people in all contentions by word of mouth; that, mighty in words, they exceeded all men in making speeches, out-talking everyone in litigious disputations;" that "both men and women, though never so lately converted to this sect, were distinguished by the same modes of speech, and by a wonderful agreement in the same opinions;" that their teachers "always pretended in their discourses to have a great respect for the law of God, to which they declared themselves to be strictly conformed both in their opinions and their conduct." This, as the testimony of an avowed enemy, is honourable to the character and influence of the party. They were no timid, wavering, faltering spirits. To their faith they had added fortitude. Heavy were the penalties to which they were subject as the known adherents and followers of the reformer; but there were men among them who were prepared to make a sacrifice, and to whom loss and suffering were light and momentary, compared with the value of principle and the enjoyment of religious freedom.

Influence is not to be determined by wealth or by numbers. We accept the testimony that the followers of Wycliffe "very much increased, and that, starting like saplings from the root of

a tree, they were multiplied, and filled every place within the compass of the land," till they included the greater part of the people, and that among them there were men of ample fortune and of generous feeling. But wealth may corrupt the greatest numbers, and thus numerical force be reduced to feebleness itself. All real power is in proportion to moral principle. The consciousness of being right, and of doing that which is in itself right, converts the feeblest of our race into a hero. Moving in harmony with the mind of God, and depending on the resources of omnipotent and infinite love, there is nothing which he is not prepared to undertake and accomplish. It was this consciousness which armed Wycliffe and his disciples in their mighty struggle. Their simple object was to purify the church and regenerate society. In this they were actuated by no selfish, sordid motive. Breathing the benevolence and the love of Christ, and gifted with new power, they addressed themselves to their work with high and solemn resolution. They occupied no common vantage ground. Sacred was the cause to which they were committed. Grand beyond expression were the interests involved in their enterprise. If the priesthood stood aloof, and looked sullenly on, the deepest sympathies of the people were with them. If the hand of oppression was lifted up against them, the shields of the cherubim were over them. If the hierarchy would have crushed them,

the Head of the church was breathing into them the consolations of his Divine Spirit. Their dependence was not on human resources. The wisdom of man, and the help of man—the whole arm of flesh—what are these but so many broken reeds? Their faith took hold of the invisible, the Divine, the inexhaustible. And amid their discouragements and their difficulties, it was to them what the limpid fountain is to the weary Arab beneath the scorching sun of the desert. Exhausted, and ready to expire, he casts a mournful eye upon the sandy waste about to become his grave; he drinks, and life seems to flow afresh within his veins; his courage returns with his strength, he resumes his journey, and seeks the combat, confident of the victory. Even so was it with our reformer and his faithful followers. In waiting on the Lord they renewed their strength, and were more than conquerors through him that loved them.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOSTILE INFLUENCES AND AGENCIES.

State of parties unfriendly to the reformer—Fierce and persevering persecution—Treatment of the Lollards—Condemnation of certain positions of the reformer, touching the doctrine and the practice of the church—His opinions, on transubstantiation, auricular confession, purgatory, and masses for the dead, and other dogmas of the papacy.

It is a question how far the insurrection of 1381 is to be attributed to the doctrines of Wycliffe and his followers. It is true that, more effectually to imbue the public mind with his opinions, the reformer kept a number of his disciples itinerating through the country, under the name and the character of POOR PRIESTS. It is true that these men were most assiduous and unwearied in their labours. It is true that thousands listened eagerly to their teaching, and as eagerly adopted their opinions. But to say that the civil commotion with which the name of Wat Tyler is so intimately and inseparably associated, and in which the commons of England played so strange a part, is to be traced immediately to the teaching of the

reformer and his disciples, is a mistake. It was to replenish an exhausted exchequer that "the parliament imposed a new and unusual tax of three groats on every person, male and female, above fifteen years of age. This impost, known by the name of THE POLL-TAX, led to more than one crisis in the future history of the people. It was levied with great rigour. Tyler, who was a blacksmith, and resided in Essex, was the first who roused the populace to a sense of its injustice, and led them to take arms in resisting it. He had a daughter, for whom, on the ground of her age, he claimed exemption. This the tax-gatherer disputed; and, to ascertain the fact, was guilty of some most unmanly and unpardonable indignities. The father was enraged, and aiming a blow with his hammer at the collector, levelled him with the ground. The bystanders applauded the spirit of the blacksmith, and resolved to defend his conduct. Having proved himself, as they thought, a champion in the cause of freedom, he was appointed the leader of the thousands who had avowed their willingness to follow him. The men of Kent were all in readiness; those of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, and other of the eastern counties, assembled at Blackheath, to the number of sixty thousand, proceeded to the metropolis, attacked and took possession of London, and committed fearful havoc on life and property. At Smithfield an interview took place between the king and

Tyler, in which the latter entered into a detail of the grievances of which he and his followers complained. They required the abolition of poundage, the liberty of buying and selling in fairs and markets, a general pardon, and the reduction of the rent of land to an equal rate. If we except this last item, there was nothing either unjust or extravagant in their claim. Having ordered his companions to retire till he should give them a signal, Tyler now lifted his sword in a most menacing manner, when treasurer Walworth, apprehending some evil intent on his royal master's life, plunged a dagger in Tyler's throat, and one of the king's knights soon despatched him. On the loss of their leader, the mutineers prepared to take revenge. Perceiving their design, Richard, who was not more than sixteen years of age, rushed into their midst, and with an affable and intrepid countenance, asked them if they would kill their king. Then he offered himself as their leader, and promised to redress their grievances. His words acted like a charm. They immediately lowered their arms, and followed the youthful prince into the fields, where he conferred on them a charter of liberty."

It was not in England alone that such scenes were witnessed. All Europe was convulsed. In the disturbed and distracted state of public feeling, the tumult might have occurred without any such stimulus as that

supplied by the labours of the rector of Lutterworth. In France, in Germany, in Italy, such outbreaks were not unusual, and these were equally menacing to the civil and the ecclesiastical authorities of the age. There was nothing in her internal condition to exempt England from danger. On the contrary, in their address to the king, the parliament affirmed that unless the administration of the kingdom were speedily reformed, it must become wholly lost, and that the injuries done to the poorer commons had caused them to rise and commit the mischief done in the late riot, while there was cause to fear still greater evils if a sufficient and timely remedy were not provided. They, in fact, charged the late insurrection upon the government. In these representations and statements even the lords concurred, and therefore nothing could more happily free our reformer from the odium which has been sought to be cast upon him and his doctrines in connexion with this affray. He was no enemy to civil order. He was the last man of his age to encourage the spirit of rebellion. He threw out no flag of opposition to established authority. Rather did he labour to exalt the civil power, and to inculcate the subordination of every other.

Such teaching, however, was obnoxious to the hierarchy; and taking advantage of the late riots, they represented to the young monarch

that those convulsions which had so recently endangered the interests and the stability of the kingdom, might be expected to return, unless some effective measures were adopted to put down Wycliffe and his followers. Nor let it be forgotten that Courtney had been elevated to the primacy—a man who was not only regarded as “the pillar of the church,” but by birth and marriage stood connected with the first and most noble families of England. Soon after his elevation, he convened a synod to decide on the best course to be taken to repress those opinions which were being so widely diffused, as well among the nobility as among the people. They met at Grey-friars on the 17th day of May, 1382, and were proceeding to pass a formal condemnation of the tenets of our reformer, when suddenly the metropolis was shaken by an earthquake, which so disturbed and alarmed the assembly, that they would immediately have broken it up as displeasing to Heaven, but for “the ready genius of the primate who presided, and who conferred a different meaning on the incident, comparing the dispersion of noxious vapours produced by such convulsions, with the purity which should be secured to the church, as the result of the present struggle to remove the pestilent from her communion.”

Some of the reformer's doctrines having been declared erroneous, and others heretical, a fierce and fiery persecution was commenced against

him and his disciples. They were represented as teaching that the bishop of Rome had no legislative authority in the Christian church—that the pomp and dignity of the higher orders of the priesthood should be done away—that the clergy should have no power, either to farm, or to live away from their benefices—that auricular confession is superfluous—that the power of granting indulgences, or of binding and loosing, is a delusion—that the worship of images is idolatry, and that the miracles attributed to them are a deception. Irritated and provoked, the clergy preferred their complaints in a petition to the monarch and the court. By surreptitious and unworthy means, they obtained the sanction of the king, and of certain peers, to a statute which provided for the punishment of heresy. Its real object was to compass the arrest and imprisonment of Wycliffe's poor priests. The sword of the magistrate was henceforth to leap from its scabbard at the bidding of the priest, and no process instituted against any offender was to terminate, except as the party accused should justify himself according to the law and the reason of holy church.

The synod which had condemned the doctrines of Wycliffe met again in June, and a letter was addressed by the primate to the chancellor of Oxford, requiring him, within a certain period, to publish the proscribed articles in the schools and churches, and intimating the

archbishop's determination to suspend all persons suspected of holding the reformer's views from all scholastic exercises, until such time as they should have purified themselves from the offence. The university was in favour of Wycliffe. The chancellor himself was rather inclined to his opinions. Several meetings of the synod were convened. Prosecutions were taken out and carried on against several men of note, who were known to be friendly to the new doctrines. Wycliffe, who was then at Lutterworth, waited the issue of these prosecutions with intense anxiety, and on several occasions referred to them in his pulpit administrations. Against Courtney, who had assumed to himself the name and office of the chief inquisitor, his very soul burned with the fire of a righteous displeasure. "He pursueth," he said, "a certain priest, because he writeth to men this English, and summoneth him, and traveleth him, so that it is hard for him to bear it. And thus he pursueth another priest, by the help of Pharisees, because he preacheth Christ's gospel freely, and without fables. Men who are on Christ's behalf, help ye now against Antichrist, for the perilous times are come which Christ and Paul foretold."

Among the opinions condemned as heretical, were those of the reformer on the nature of the eucharist. He believed, in opposition to the church, that in the Lord's supper the bread and

wine undergo no change, but remain the same after consecration as before it. Nor was he alone in this opinion. It was not till the ninth or tenth century that the dogma of transubstantiation became known, and no sooner was it propounded than it was opposed. A French divine and prelate, of the name of Berenger or Berengarius, who lived and died in the eleventh century, subjected the doctrine to the most rigid investigation, and had the manly fortitude to disavow it. It formed no part of the creed of the simple-minded and pious Vaudois. It was unknown in England in the tenth century. Lanfranc, an Italian by birth, and who, on the deposition of Stigand, became archbishop of Canterbury, was the first who wrote against Berengarius, and maintained the doctrine of the real presence. It was then taken up by the great body of the Anglo-Norman clergy, and met with little, if any opposition, till the time of Wycliffe.

This leading error of the Romish church is thus defined:—"By the sacramental words, duly pronounced by the priest, the bread and wine upon the altar are transubstantiated, or substantially converted into the true body and blood of Christ; so that after consecration there is not in that venerable sacrament the material bread and wine which before existed, considered in their own substances or natures, but only the species of the same, under which are contained the true body of Christ and his blood, not figuratively, nor tropically, but

essentially, substantially, and corporally; so that Christ is verily there in his own proper bodily presence." It was against this false dogma that our reformer lifted his voice in loud and solemn protestation. This he first did in a course of divinity lectures, which he read at Oxford, and in the face of the greater excommunication, suspension from all scholastic exercises, and the forfeiture of personal liberty,—for an assembly of twelve doctors, summoned by the chancellor, had already condemned his conclusions, and decreed imprisonment and excommunication as the punishment of all who should embrace and maintain them. As he had often declared it to be the duty of the magistrate to protect the life, the property, and the personal freedom of the subject, apart from all ecclesiastical relations and duties, so now he appealed on his own behalf to the civil powers. Parliament was not then sitting, nor would it meet for some time to come. On its assembling, in November, 1382, he presented, in the form of a petition, a summary of his views and opinions. In this document he not only repudiated the idea of the real presence in the sacrament, but prayed that the doctrine of the eucharist might be openly taught in all the churches, as Christ and his apostles had left it. He asserted that tithes and other voluntary offerings should be withdrawn from prelates and priests who were guilty of great and notorious sins—that it was in many cases lawful and meritorious in tem-

poral authority to take away the temporal property of the church—and that religious vows were a mere human device, and of no obligation. The effect upon the parliament of this teaching was, that the obnoxious statute of the synod was annulled, and it was declared that men were no further bound to the prelates than were their ancestors in former times. Wycliffe was then summoned to appear before a convocation at Oxford. Though deserted by Lancaster, he was nothing daunted. True to his purpose, he threw himself, with renewed confidence, on God. He conducted his own defence with consummate skill and dexterity. The confessions which he then made were rather a re-assertion than a renunciation of his peculiar doctrines. At such a crisis, and in such circumstances, he was not the man to shrink from the open avowal of his opinions. Sentence was passed upon him. Silenced at Oxford, and his connexion with the university dissolved, he retired to Lutterworth, where, with enfeebled strength and growing infirmities, he devoted his time to such writings as might tend still more widely to diffuse his principles, and bring about that grand consummation to which his life and labours had been devoted.

Transubstantiation was not the only dogma which he disputed and denied. To auricular confession, the sale of indulgences, the invocation of saints, the worship of images, prayers

for the dead, the celibacy of the clergy, he was decidedly opposed. Lingard avows that Wycliffe inculcated the doctrine of purgatory, and strenuously maintained the efficacy of the mass. On which Dr. Vaughan remarks:—"Surely the man who could go through his pulpit services for twelve months together without more than a single reference to the mass, except to censure its imperfections and abuses, can hardly be said to have been a strenuous advocate for its efficacy. Mr. Lewis may be right in stating that Wycliffe believed in 'the bitter pains of purgatory;' for during a large portion of his life he did so. But in inquiries of this nature, nearly everything must depend upon dates. To a correct acquaintance with this subject, it was strictly necessary to know the frequency, or the variety of the reformer's allusions to it; to know, also, something of the distinctness or obscurity that may have marked those allusions; and to know, above all, that before his death Wycliffe had learned to use the word purgatory as referring merely to an intermediate state, through which the most holy of mankind must pass to their final rest."* Such an apology is altogether unsatisfactory. It is undeniable, that to several of the Romish tenets he adhered till the hour of his death. Up to the last, his mind was but partially enlightened, and as partially informed. The marvel is, not that he was on a few points in

* Life of Wycliffe, vol. ii. p. 292, Note.

error, but that he was on so many points in the right ; and that, amidst so many adverse agencies and influences, he reached so advanced a stand-point.

After his separation from Oxford, he was summoned to appear before the pope, to answer the charges which had been preferred against him. Paralysed and enfeebled in body, he was not in a condition to undertake a journey to Rome, and therefore he addressed a letter to his superior, in which he professes his joy in the opportunity now given him of telling the pope the belief which he held ; for if his faith was right, and given of God, his holiness would gladly preserve it ; and that if his faith was in error, his holiness would wisely amend it. He then intimates, that he took it as a part of faith that no man should follow the pope, no, nor any saint that is now in heaven, but inasmuch as he followed Christ ; that he took it as wholesome counsel, that the pope should leave his worldly lordship to worldly lords, as Christ enjoins ; and that he should speedily move all his clerks to do so, for thus did Christ, and so taught his disciples. Instead of going to Rome he remained at Lutterworth, and produced those compositions, which were to prove like seed-corn cast on the waters, which would find a congenial soil, in which they would vegetate, and spring up, and yield a hundred-fold.*

* It is not possible in our limited space even to enumerate

Many of the theological opinions of our reformer the reader must have gathered from the preceding pages. Believing in the election of grace, he could not fail to assert that the exclusive dependence of the sinner for the remission of sins must be on the satisfaction and the sacrifice of Christ; that to this sublime doctrine of a free remission were directly opposed the laws of penance and the practice of pilgrimage; that without the grace of God and the merits of Christ, all that any saint ever did could not bring a soul to heaven; that the merit of saints was a purely human invention; that a man is justified by faith; that justification is always accompanied by sanctification; that there is an eternal distinction between virtue and vice; that whomsoever the Spirit quickens he purifies, whom he enlightens he transforms; that the Spirit is the first and producing cause of all those holy affections and higher graces which enter into and complete the character of the Christian. However far he carried the doctrines of free grace, it is clear that he held them in righteousness of life. He says:—"Let us then deny ourselves in whatever we have made ourselves by sin; and such as we are made by grace, let us continue. If a proud man be converted to Christ, and is made

the productions of the reformer's pen. This enumeration would extend to several pages, and may be found in Lewis, and Vaughan, and Le Bas. Wycliffe's literary performances go to make up an amount of composition which seems almost incredible in the circumstances in which he was placed.

humble, he hath denied himself. If a covetous man ceaseth to covet, and giveth of his own to relieve the needy, he hath denied himself. If an impure man changeth his life, and becometh chaste, he hath denied himself. He who withstandeth and forsaketh the unreasonable will of the flesh denieth himself. The cross of Christ is taken when we shrink not from contempt for the love of the truth ; when man is crucified unto the world, and the world is crucified unto him, and he setteth its joy at nought. It is not enough to bear the cross of a painful life, except we follow Christ in his virtues, in meekness, love, and heavenly desire. . . . What is turning to God ? Nothing but turning from the world, from sin, and from the fiend. What is turning from God, but turning to the changing things of this world, to delight in the creatures, the lusts of the flesh, and the works of the fiend ? To be turned from the world is to set at nought its joys, and to suffer meekly all bitterness, slanders, and deceits, for the love of Christ ; to leave all occupations unlawful and unprofitable to the soul, so that man's will and thought become dead to the things which the world loveth and worshippeth." It is, perhaps, impossible exactly to define or determine the creed of the reformer. Unless his writings were all collated and authenticated, and some competent and unprejudiced mind were to sift and examine his opinions, with all their modifications and changes, and give the result to the

world, it would be vain for us to attempt to fix the boundary line of his faith. Though opposed alike to the doctrine and the polity of the Romish church, he yet remained in her communion, accepted and enjoyed her preferments, and yielded up his life before her altar. Had he lived at a later period, he would, doubtless, with the advantages of purer and increasing light, have entirely quitted her pale.

CHAPTER IX.

EXTENT OF WYCLIFFE'S REFORMATION.

His age rather a period of preparation—No common value and importance to be attached to his services—The spirit of the people—Ecclesiastical despotism trampling upon the genius of human liberty—The right of private judgment—Sufficiency of Scripture—Man's free thoughts not to be controlled—Man responsible only to God for his belief—Mind impatient of restraint—Society in a transition state—A crisis.

THE results of men's labours are oftentimes wholly unconnected with any previous plan. In giving themselves up enthusiastically to the ideas which possess their minds, men are frequently the unconscious instruments by which God works out his own purposes ; and, therefore, the greatest achievements of the greatest men on behalf of humanity, are not to be viewed as flowing from any previous arrangement or determination, but rather as the sequence of spontaneous and unpremeditated effort. "Nay, these mighty men were able to do their great deeds precisely because a higher than human wisdom formed the plan of their labours, and prepared the way for them. The

work was greater than the workmen. They had no presentiments of the results that were to follow from the toils to which they felt themselves impelled. So it was with Luther, when he kindled the spark which set the half of Europe in a blaze, and commenced the sacred flame which refined the Christian church."

And if so with Luther, much more so with Wycliffe. The confessor of Wittenburgh only followed in the steps of the rector of Lutterworth, and rather fanned the living spark which had already been struck. The one had the precedence of the other, but both were instrumental in fulfilling the plan of God's mercy for the progress of his kingdom among men. The age of Wycliffe was rather the period of preparation. Much had to be done to prepare the nations for the great organic change involved in the Reformation of the sixteenth century. There is nothing premature in the march and movements of Divine Providence. There are no sudden leaps, no arbitrary evolutions. Everything in the government of God and the history of the world proceeds on a gradual and progressive plan of development. Nothing is perfected at once. Light comes to its fullness and effulgence by an easy and delightful ascent. Vegetation passes through successive stages of development and growth before it reaches maturity. The organization of the human body has its laws of assimilation and increase,

from the feebleness of infancy up to the perfection of manhood. Mind follows the same law of progress; and in that spiritual experience which is common to all the children of God, a like analogy prevails. Wycliffe was but as the sower going forth to sow. The seed was required first to fall on the soil of prepared hearts to produce the desired fruits. In due season the harvest would follow.

It is true that in an age of quicker life and more rapid development, the reaper may, in the great field of human improvement, overtake the sower—but still the sower must go first. No little importance, therefore, is to be attached to the labours of our reformer at that earlier stage in the progress of divine truth. Whatever may be the stand-point from which we view the reformation effected by Luther, the work of Wycliffe must ever be regarded as an essential element in that grand religious revolution. His principles and doctrines had been left, like so much hidden leaven, to operate in the depth of the popular mind, till, by their intense and divine power, they changed men's modes of thought, and revolutionized the whole of their spiritual being. The mind needed to be freed from many foreign elements with which it was still encumbered, and without ascribing too much to mere human agency, Wycliffe, as a simple preacher of God's truth, was the instrument of a power whose

effects neither he nor any one else could measure.

Though forsaken by John of Gaunt, his former friend and patron, and though he stood before the convocation of Oxford almost alone, the heart of the nation was with him. The age makes the man, no less truly than the man impresses the age. The great thoughts which had so long revolved in the mind of Wycliffe were not confined to him. They were the property of other minds, which were sighing for life and freedom. All the difference was, that God placed him in a more advantageous position to give expression to those thoughts. Their enunciation was but the echo of a thousand like noble spirits. These had in them the germs of a true greatness, because they had in them a Divine life; and that this life might have its freer and more perfect development, they came out into the clear and sunny light of a pure Christianity. "The lofty beech, shut out from light by the density of the surrounding forest, lifts its leafless trunk towards the clouds; but we are more pleased with the majestic and isolated elm, whose noble branches, freely expanded on all sides, afford a retreat to the fowls of the air—a shelter to the herdsman and the traveller." To be truly great, and to do good, we must be prepared to endure isolation rather than partake of the corruption of the age. But Wycliffe was not alone. Some of the

people were in advance both of him and their age. He was but the leader of others, who were willing to fall back into the rear, and follow the same consecrated banner.

It was no common force which this sacred phalanx had to withstand. Such were the early triumphs of Christianity, that, under her sublime influence, the whole world promised to become the sanctuary and the home of spiritual freedom. But this promising condition was too happy to continue long. The utterances of truth became increasingly feeble, indistinct, and inarticulate. Those who had been sent into the world to be God's speakers, and the guardians of man's spiritual freedom, were the first to infringe that freedom, and to conceal that truth. The priesthood having assumed the power of prescribing the faith, and of determining the destiny of the human soul, the people were no longer free to think. In their hands the Bible was not a safe book. All inquiry was proscribed. Reason was called to give place to authority, and the church became at once the teacher and the final judge of whatever the people were to believe. Arming herself with judicial and supreme authority, she had recourse to pains and penalties, as the only possible expedient to insure submission and obedience. The church laid down the sword of the Spirit for the sword of the magistrate; and, trampling upon truth and con-

science, and all that is most precious, coerced men into that outward conformity, which either gave birth to hypocrisy, or created in their minds, not only a distaste for religion, but a positive hatred of everything Christian. The spiritual despotism became all but crushing. Mind was prostrated. Man was enslaved. Tyranny trampled on the genius of liberty, and England was in danger of being made subject to a foreign yoke.

Once admit the supremacy of the pope, and the infallibility of the church, and the right of private judgment can no longer be maintained. Convinced of this, our reformer justly argued that Christ, as the one only Head of the church, must have given a perfect rule to guide his disciples in everything affecting their faith and character; and maintained that his pure religion, without any addition, could be shown to be the most perfect law:—"Either," he writes, "Christ might give such a rule, the most perfect to be kept in this life, and would not—and then he was envious; or else Christ would ordain such a rule, and might not—and then Christ was unmighty; or else he might, and could, but would not—and then he was unwise; and that is a heresy no man should consent to hear. Therefore it is plain, that Christ both might, and could, and would ordain a rule the most perfect that should be kept in this life. And so Christ, of his endless wisdom

and charity, has ordained such a rule. And thus on each side men are bound, upon pain of heresy, and of blasphemy, and of condemnation, to believe and acknowledge that the religion of Jesus Christ to his apostles, and kept by them in its own freedom, without addition from sinful man's error, is the most perfect of all." But to whom is the law addressed? Is it to the clergy or to the laity? In other words, is the Bible the book of the people, or designed only for the priesthood? If the revelation of God be addressed to all men, then each man has an inalienable right to interpret that revelation for himself. Wycliffe maintained that in the sacred Scriptures "all truth is either expressed or implied;" that "other writings can have worth or authority, only so far as their sentiment is derived from the Scriptures;"—that we should follow "the law of God and of reason more than that of our popes and cardinals, so much so that if we had a hundred popes, and if all the friars were cardinals, to the law of the gospel we should bow more than to all this multitude;" and that it was nothing less than blasphemy for any ecclesiastic or ecclesiastical body to attempt to invest their interpretation with the same authority as the record itself. Every individual man is responsible for his belief; and since no one can bear away the responsibility of his fellow, no one is at liberty to prescribe the grounds of his faith.

Not only is Scripture all-sufficient as a rule of faith, but the very existence of a revelation from God is an appeal to the individual judgment and conscience. If otherwise, whence did the church receive her interpretation? It must either have been by inspiration or by the solution of her own acknowledged doctors and teachers. If by inspiration, then it is a part of the revelation itself—something superadded, and communicating additional information. If by the solution of learned and holy men, then their reasonings and conclusions can be regarded in no other light than the result of private thought and devout study. And if they could, as finite and erring men, reach conclusions which it is right and safe for the church to accept, why may not other men, and every man, reach conclusions equally safe? Before we can give up the sufficiency of Scripture, and the right of private judgment, we must be satisfied that we can at the same moment transfer the burden of accountability from ourselves to the conscience of another—that he will take our place at the bar of God, and subject himself to all the consequences incident to the possibility of our being at last found in fatal error. Will the church and the priesthood of Rome accept this solemn alternative? We trow not.

Human thought is not to be controlled by man. Before a man can be free to act, he must be

free to think. We would not set up individual judgment and individual opinion against the universal consent of mankind. Deference is due, in no common degree, to collective wisdom and accumulated thought, but this comes far short of the homage which is claimed by infallibility. The many may err as well as the individual; but apart from the error to which they are subject, they have neither the right nor the power to interfere with the laws of the human mind. The immolation of man's free thoughts has ever been the goal to which the Romish hierarchy have pressed forward, and for this end they have had recourse to physical suffering—to the most heartless and cruel inflictions. With unaccountable folly they have tried to reach the conscience through the medium of bodily torture.

“Force first made conquest, and that conquest law,
Till superstition taught the tyrant awe—
Then shared the tyranny—then lent it aid,
And gods of conquerors, slaves of subjects made.”

The foot which sought to press the free soil of England in the fourteenth century was the foot of a tyrant, with more than a tyrant's power to crush the liberties, the faith, and the lives of her children. England nobly struggled. Mind became impatient of restraint, and only waited the appointed hour to burst her bond and assert her freedom. Wycliffe was the forerunner and the prophet of the new era. Like the Baptist of old, he was the voice of one crying in the wilderness—Prepare ye the way.

His words were caught up by eager multitudes, who prolonged the note of preparation. Expectation was heightened into confidence, and confidence waited for the realization. Society was in a transition state. Dissatisfied and disgusted with the past, they were seen passing over into the new. There was an unusual quickness of thought and activity of intellect. Men seemed to take up the most vital truths, as if by intuition. The spirit of life moved upon the face of society, and entered its most hidden recesses. The reformer of Rome was the patriot of England. He was not more anxious to deliver the church from her corruption, than his country from her bondage. He sighed not more deeply for purity than for freedom; and had the time arrived for the fulfilment of his great idea, he would have carried the nation with him.

Time has its epochs, and nations have their crises; but events are not loose and unconnected things, like so many scattered elements without any law of attraction to draw them together, or without any common centre to which they may gravitate, and at which they may rest. We have only to link them to that great chain of cause and effect which embraces the past, and the present, and the future, and binds the whole universe in one. As in nature, with all its diversity, there is an unity of design and end, so is it in providence. Its field of opera-

tion may be too wide for our limited view, and its movements may be too complex and too grand for our finite comprehension, yet all are connected and harmonious. There is not, perhaps, a single providential event but has its definite relation to the great system of things, and its immediate or remote bearings on the distributions of Divine mercy among our guilty race. What is taking place now may have its influence and its issues ages hence. If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without our Father, shall we exclude Him from those events which go to make up the history of the world and of our race? Or, shall we separate these events from that great remedial plan which contemplates the highest interests and the everlasting happiness of man? Not more certainly has God bound the planets to their centre by an unfailing law, than he has linked the movements and issues of his providence with the manifestations and results of his saving grace. They run the one into the other. And it is in their combined action and effects that we shall be called to contemplate them in the clearer light of eternity. As the sun bursts through the darkest cloud, and spreads out his glory by reflection in that splendid arch which spans the heavens, so, in a future state, grace will be seen to shine with seven-fold brightness in the most profound events and incomprehensible dispensations of Providence that occurred in the present life.

It was a crisis in the history of England. Wycliffe had led his country on to a point at which it was impossible for the most far-seeing to predict the issue. Like the lightning which is seen to play on the margin of the dark thunder-cloud, the wrath of the hierarchy was ever and anon seeking to expend itself on the disciples and supporters of the new faith. Could the ecclesiastical but have enlisted and put in force the civil power, it would have persecuted even unto death. The mitre would have surmounted the crown, and the power which was ordained to be a terror to evil doers, would have been turned against the most loyal and devoted subjects of the realm. Men of the purest principles would have fallen a sacrifice to the pride of spiritual domination. In proportion as Popery gained the ascendancy did she become pre-eminent in the spirit of persecution. She placed the canon above the civil law, and maintained that "priesthood is above royalty, as much as the soul is superior to the body; that princes are over provinces, and kings over kingdoms, but Peter carries it over them all, in both the extent and the fullness of power, for he is the vicar of Him to whom the earth belongs—the world, and all that dwell therein." In the face of these lofty pretensions, England must either become the vassal of Rome, or Rome must be resisted even unto blood.

CHAPTER X.

THE CLOSE OF THE REFORMER'S LIFE AND LABOURS.

The influence of Wycliffe's doctrine not confined to England—
The faithfulness and fortitude of his disciples—The reformer
Divinely protected and spared—His retirement in Lutter-
worth—His sickness and death—His doctrine survives, and
obtains still wider conquest—Indignity offered to his
remains.

THERE is in Christianity a spirit of enlarged benevolence, which is cheering and refreshing to contemplate. It runs counter to the selfishness of our nature. It overleaps the narrow bounds of human pride and prejudice, and looks out with benignity and love on a sinful and ruined race. Its steps are free. Its path is unconfined. Its efforts are unwearied. Its charity is as wide as the world, and as deep as human misery. Such is the genius of the gospel. Its very essence is love. And the moment the heart receives the great impression of its grace, it expands, and opens, and there come forth the gushings of a free and unconfined benevolence. The Christian's solicitude cannot be limited by country or by kindred. His

philanthropy embraces the world. Not that he can be indifferent to the claims of home. As a true patriot, he cannot but seek his country's weal, and feel his country's woe. But the love of country must give place to the love of man. Here he rises to higher ground. He moves in a larger sphere. Who does not admire the immortal Howard in his career of mercy, as he is seen forcing his way over burning sands, and rolling waves, and wilds of snow, with so much light and love in his path, that it seems as if the footstep of some angel-spirit had impressed our earth? The soul is subject to a loftier affection still. The love of Christ constrains. Spiritual light reveals spiritual misery, and spiritual misery begets spiritual solicitude; spiritual solicitude leads to spiritual action; and the effort which goes to recover man from sin and wretchedness, is the highest and most Christ-like. Never was there a truer patriot, or a purer philanthropist, than the great apostle of the nations. But, as a Christian—as an ambassador of the cross—the love of souls absorbed him.

Our reformer went not abroad to proclaim his doctrines, but those doctrines were carried into almost every country in Europe by his disciples and by his writings. John Huss and Jerome of Prague were among the first and most intrepid adherents to the new faith, and their testimony to that faith they both sealed

with their blood. Before their time, or the age of Wycliffe, "the Waldenses formed a long chain of witnesses to the truth. Men more free than the rest of the church appear from the remotest times to have inhabited the summits of the Piedmont Alps. Their number was augmented and their doctrine was purified by the disciples of Waldo." The merchant of Lyons had in view to re-establish in life the perfection of primitive Christianity, and the descendants of the Vaudois and the Albigenses were now to be found scattered through Germany, France, and Italy itself. But in no country did the reformed faith take such hold of the national mind as to promise any very immediate change in the condition of Europe. Its principles were, indeed, sufficiently widespread, and so expressed and embodied as more than once to shake the Romish hierarchy to its very foundation; but these principles possessed the individual rather than the commonwealth, and from the individual rather than from the national consciousness were they left to work out their regenerating and transforming effects. There was in them, however, an intensity and a power which could not but be felt and appreciated. This power passed, as if by some electric influence, from heart to heart, and became the bond of a holy brotherhood.

In avowing his doctrines, and in maintaining his principles, it cannot be said that Wycliffe

was called to make any costly sacrifice. The privations and the sufferings of many of his followers far exceeded his own. With the increase of the Lollards, as the disciples of the Reformation were styled, the hierarchy called aloud for the punishment of those who dissented from the teachings of the church. Penal statutes were enacted, and such as refused to abjure their heretical opinions were held obnoxious to the secular power. Fines, confiscation, imprisonment, and death followed. But Christianity is the religion of true heroism. The intrepidity, the courage, the invincible firmness of her suffering children, have challenged the admiration of the world in all ages. These noble attributes triumphantly came out in the character and conduct of those despised Lollards. Many of them took joyfully the spoiling of their goods—endured with the meekness of Christ—in the very depth of their affliction committed themselves in the confidence of faith unto Him that judgeth righteously, and for the truth's sake loved not their lives even unto death.

Martyrdom is but the outward expression of inward principles. Life is too sacred a thing to be thrown away, and no man who realizes the fact that it is derived from God and dependent on him, would seek to part with it but in obedience to his will. In yielding up his life under such circumstances, the man of God will be strengthened with all might according

to that glorious power which constitutes the very essence of Christian patience; he will shrink from no suffering, and will grow pale in the face of no danger. The church of Christ has had her confessors and her martyrs in every age. Nor were the Lollards the least faithful or the least heroic. Their fortitude forsook them not even at the stake. They died with a constancy and a joy which bespoke their confidence in the doctrine of life and incorruption brought to light by the gospel, and in yielding up their spirits into the hands of Him who had redeemed them, passed immediately into his unsuffering and everlasting kingdom.*

* "Certain strolling hypocrites, who were called Lollards, or praisers of God, deceived some women of quality in Hainault and Brabant. Because those who praised God, generally did it in verse, therefore, in the Latin style of the Middle Age, to praise God meant to sing to him, and such as were frequently employed in acts of adoration were called religious singers. And as prayers and hymns are regarded as a certain external sign of piety towards God, therefore those who aspired after a more than ordinary degree of piety and religion, and for that purpose were more frequently occupied in singing hymns of praise to God than others, were in the common popular language called Lollards. Hereupon this word acquired the same meaning with that of the term Beghard, which denoted a person remarkable for piety; for in all the old records, from the eleventh century, these two words are synonymous: so that all who are styled Beghards are also called Lollards, which may be proved to a demonstration from many authors, and particularly from many passages in the writings of Felix Malleolus against the Beghards; so that there are precisely as many sorts of Beghards as of Lollards. . . . The priests and monks being inveterately exasperated against these good men, propagated injurious suspicions of them, and endeavoured to persuade the people, that innocent and beneficent as the Lollards seemed to be, they were in reality the contrary, being tainted with the most pernicious sentiments of a religious kind, and secretly addicted to all sorts of vices. Thus by

While the fire of persecution was scorching and consuming his followers, Wycliffe escaped unhurt. Its lambent flame played about him, but scarcely touched him. He was Divinely protected and spared. Whether it was from considerations of state policy, or from the influence of that higher and sterner virtue which characterized the new sect, or from the love of letters and good men, that the duke of Lancaster and others of the nobility extended their patronage to the reformer, we stop not to inquire. He was conscientiously, as he believed, doing God's work in God's world; and throwing himself on Divine guidance and protection, there were raised up in various parts of the kingdom those who not only favoured his doctrines, but were prepared to shelter his person. Not that the emissaries of Rome had become remiss in the attempt to track the steps of the reformed party, or that Rome itself had relaxed in the force and severity of her measures, but simply that the reformer and his friends were within the circle and the influence of a higher power. He who can lay all the resources of the universe under contribution, can be at no loss for the means of insuring defence and security to his servants in the prosecution of commanded duty. Jesus lay in the hinder part of a ship asleep, amidst the outbursting fury of the storm, and his

degrees it came to pass, that any person who covered heresies or crimes under the appearance of piety was called a Lollard.”
—*Mosheim*.

followers may commit themselves with confidence and joy to his illimitable power and unchanging love, knowing, that in every trial he is still near to minister consolation and support.

Mercifully spared in the midst of persecution and suffering, the rector of Lutterworth sought the quiet and retirement of his parish. He returned to his living, so burdened with mental anxiety, and so enfeebled in bodily health, as to render it necessary that he should seek assistance in the discharge of ministerial and parochial duty. His intense and fervid energy—an energy which seemed to be unwearied and inexhaustible—levied too heavy a contribution from his physical constitution for the latter to stand much longer against it. And yet his retirement was not passed in inaction. If his living and breathing form was not so often seen in the pulpit and in the cottage, his study was witness to no common mental application. Till life's last moment, he never considered his work done. If comparatively he had lost the power to preach, he had still the power to write. Subsequently to his exclusion from Oxford, not only did he renew his contest with the friars-mendicant, but he composed several treatises, more or less bearing on existing and prevailing abuses.* But the tide of life was fast ebbing,

* Among these may be specified his TRIALOGUS—On obedience to prelates—On the deceits of Satan and of his

as if it hastened to touch upon another and a higher shore. The man who had roused the whole hierarchy of England—who had more than once challenged the supreme pontiff—who had made the kingdom echo with his most solemn testimony against the corruptions of the church and the degeneracy of society, and whose life was a long wished-for sacrifice, was, in the arrangements of infinite love, to close his labours in peace, and calmly die in the bosom of the people among whom he had spent so many years of holy and memorable service. On the 29th of December, 1384, during the celebration of mass, and just as the host was about to be elevated, he was for the second time seized with paralysis, which at once deprived him of speech, and from which he never recovered. He died two days afterwards, if not full of years, yet full of honours.* He was in the sixty-first year of his age. But in how few other instances were three-score years ever so employed! Let his claim to originality—to intellectual might and mastery—to learning and piety, be what it may, it seems all but incredible that any one man

priests—On the duty of lords—Of servants and lords—Of good preaching priests—On the four deceits of Antichrist—On the prayers of good men—Of Clerks Possessioners—On the rise of the Crusade—Against the Avignon pope, and its failure—On the sentence of the curse expounded—On prelates, and other subjects.

* “Admirable (says Fuller the church historian,) that a hare so often hunted, with so many packs of dogs, should die at last, quietly sitting in his form.”

should have gone through such an amount of self-denying, laborious, and exhausting service. To say that he was supernaturally endowed and strengthened, is the true solution. His dependence on promised grace and succour was implicit and constant—his aim was sublime and holy—his motives were single and unmixed—his services greater and wider than could have been expected in such an age.

Into the dying chamber of the reformer we are not permitted to enter. Time has drawn an impenetrable veil over the closing scene of his great life, just because, so far as we know, time has preserved no record of that event. We may conceive, however, what openings there were to his spirit of the invisible and the heavenly—how full of life and glory were his hopes—with what composure and fortitude he passed through the article of death—how his departure was felt as the setting of some greater luminary—and with what regrets and tears he was followed to the grave by his simple-minded and devoted parishioners, as they remembered with what earnest power and eloquence he had expounded to them the sublime and saving doctrines of their holy faith. With the death of the reformer, however, expired not the reformation. Wycliffe left behind him a noble band of true witnesses to God's truth. His poor priests were a body of disinterested labourers and godly men, whose creed and

opinions very closely corresponded with the well-known doctrines of their master. They continued their itinerancy and their preaching after his decease. Even at Oxford his opinions obtained to such an extent, as to excite the indignation of the ecclesiastical authorities, and to justify the representation, that "she who was formerly the mother of virtues, the prop of the catholic faith, the singular pattern of obedience, now brought forth only abortive or degenerate children, who encouraged contumacy and rebellion, and sowed tares among the pure wheat." There the memory of the reformer was cherished with profound veneration; but whether the university ever drew up and passed under their seal a solemn testimonial to his great learning and good life, is a question which still remains to be settled.

A better testimonial to his virtues and his fidelity is supplied in the low abuse which his enemies heaped on his name and his memory. They were forward to affirm, that in death he had been "suddenly struck by the judgment of God;" and all those physical or muscular effects which follow an attack of paralysis, they represented as incontrovertible proof that "the curse which God had thundered forth against Cain had now fallen upon him;" that he breathed out his malicious spirit to the abodes of darkness. Nor did they stop here. In 1415, more than thirty years after Wycliffe's death, the

Council of Constance selected from his writings a number of propositions which they reprobated and branded with the mark of heresy; consigned his memory to infamy and execration; issued an order that "his body and bones, if they might be discovered and known from the bodies of other faithful people, should be taken from the ground, and thrown away from the burial of any church, according to the canon laws and decrees!" All nations—even the most rude and barbarous—have held sacred the ashes of the dead. Never was it known that malice or ill-will could descend and avenge itself on the deposit of the grave. It was reserved for the church of Rome, in the fourteenth century of Christian love, and in the heart of our own England, to do a deed, which of itself is sufficient to blot the name of the communion by whose command, and with whose sanction, it was done. Thirteen years after the order was pronounced, the grave of Wycliffe was opened and ransacked; what were supposed to be his remains were uncere- moniously disinterred, then committed to the flames, and the ashes cast into the adjoining brook—happily, we should say, named the Swift, for "this brook conveyed them into Avon, the Avon into the Severn, the Severn into the narrow seas, they into the main ocean; and thus the ashes of Wycliffe were the emblem of his doctrine, which is now dispersed all the world over."

CHAPTER XI.

THE WRITINGS OF WYCLIFFE.

Development, or the principle of gradual discovery—Wycliffe a medium of higher revelation—Number and character of his writings—His polemics inseparable from the defence of experimental and practical religion—Extracts—Influence of his publications—Last struggles of the power of darkness.

It is but another mode of acknowledging the weakness and the finiteness of our nature, to say that Providence observes a gradual progression in the mental development of the human race. Whatever knowledge was immediately imparted to man, it is without controversy that since man cut himself off by voluntary transgression from the one infinite Source of life and illumination, God has dealt with him on the principle of gradual discovery. The first revelation was but partial and confined, and constituted little more than a preparation for the future. Each communication was an advance on that which preceded it—another chapter in the historic life or progress of humanity, and handed that humanity on to a still more advanced point. It was thus that Divine Revelation, as a gradual

discovery, not only met but anticipated the longings of the human soul. It was this progressive development which kept humanity ever fresh and ever living, by the communication of the most quickening influence ; for in proportion as truth was revealed, was the power heightened by which to act on the interior nature of man ; and hence the true and perfect manhood of our race could only come with a perfect revelation. For this perfect revelation we must look to the Great Teacher sent from God, who not only took up and embodied in himself all that had gone before, but added and communicated all which Infinite Wisdom ever designed to make known anterior to the consummation of all things. In Him were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ; but these have all been laid open by his incarnation and teaching, and it is just as the truth is apprehended and taken up into our own spiritual being, that the Divine life in us is strengthened and perfected.

Just as all truth was not revealed at once, neither can it be all taken up at once. The mind is a finite instrument, and must ever keep within its own limitations. To what extent its powers may be exerted, we profess not to say. Certain it is that the great majority of men rest satisfied with present attainments ; and to such, every one who rises to higher and more advanced ground, becomes the organ of a wider and fuller information. As in climbing some

alpine height, he who makes the ascent can, by commanding a wider and a clearer horizon, become the medium of communication to those who linger at the foot of the mount, so, in proportion as the mind is enlightened in the knowledge of God, and can apprehend the saving truths of Christianity, is a man competent to teach others, and conduct them forward in the path of life. Wycliffe had drunk deep at the fountain of inspiration. Not more refreshing to the traveller across the desert, could be a stream of living water, than were the truths of the Bible to our reformer. With a soul morally free and pure, he had a growing capacity for higher knowledge and more heavenly training. Susceptible of the fuller and more perfect illumination of the Spirit, he moved along the path of truth with a calm and persevering progress. He was taught of God ; and as his divine education advanced, his desire to communicate what he had learned and received, became stronger and still more intense. Other men may have been as fully enlightened and as well instructed in " the deep things of God," but they occupied not the same position, nor could they have commanded the same attention. He was a Divinely chosen organ through which God spoke to man, in an age of deep spiritual torpor and death. How otherwise could the numbed and deadened soul be awakened and quickened into life, but by the Spirit of truth ? And this Spirit was to act through human instrumentality. Such is the Divine arrange-

ment. And in selecting his instruments, God has, in every instance, respect to adaptation. The best undertaking might be marred and ruined from the want of fitness in the agents employed in carrying it out. Divinely prepared, Wycliffe was divinely qualified; and, in the hand of God, he effected a work whose final issue can be realised only in a renovated and saved world.

The people being denied all access to the book of God, not only did our reformer preach, and through his preaching become the organ of a higher development of Divine truth to man;—he also wrote. Most prolific was his pen. His productions are variously estimated at from one hundred and fifty to three hundred in number. The authenticity of some of the manuscripts has been questioned, and their genuineness denied. But after we have given up all which are doubtful, there remains a sufficient number to determine the character of Wycliffe's doctrines and piety. These, in general, consist of short treatises on some given points, and from their brevity the work of transcription was comparatively easy. Copies were indefinitely multiplied, and found their way into every part of the kingdom, and into every class of society. They were sent to the continent of Europe, found a place in the public and the private library—on the shelf of the peasant, and in the cabinet of the prince—under the gown of the priest, and in the hand of the laity. Some

of his larger works could not have been written without prodigious labour, nor purchased but at a princely cost. Such as more generally obtained, and which were written in his vernacular tongue, "not for the benefit of courtiers and scholars, but for the instruction of the less learned portion of the people," were read with avidity and interest.

Though many of his writings are of a purely controversial character, they yet give us no little insight into the state of religion in a period of deep spiritual movement. Though others treat of philosophical and scholastic subjects, not a few of them deal with all the higher verities of the Christian faith. When "he who ought to have carried the crozier of peace, hoisted the pennon of war," and converted all Europe into a theatre of deep conflict, the question to be settled was, whether the civil power or the spiritual despotism should be supreme. In this contest, our reformer took the first rank. He protested against ecclesiastical pride and usurpation. But he contended for something higher and better than the mere subordination of one power to another. It was because the church had lost the spirit of life that it sought to perpetuate its existence by an influence foreign to itself. God had left her, and the world must support her. Wycliffe knew this, and his aim was to withdraw the church from all foreign alliance, and bring her back to a simple and spiritual dependence on

her risen and reigning Lord. He plunged into controversy, not because he was a sour and unyielding spirit—a man of bitterness and contention, but because he ardently loved the truth for which he stood forward as the apologist and the advocate. His temper was sometimes ruffled, but we never find him sinking the Christian, or the Christian minister, in the mere controversialist. He was careful to cherish his own personal piety. His was not an official but an experimental religion. While he contended earnestly for the faith, his daily aim was to grow in grace, to reach the stature of a perfect man in Christ—to be drawn into deeper fellowship with the Spirit of life, and live as one whose conversation or citizenship was in heaven.

Of this fact, several of his tracts and treatises give us the most satisfactory proof. A single extract from his *Caitiff ON THE LOVE OF JESUS*, lets us see to the very depth of his heart, as a sanctified and an adopted child of God. It is the language of a soul which can find no object but Him in whom it hath pleased the Father all fullness should dwell, on which its desires and affections can terminate:—"O thou everlasting Love! inflame my mind to love God, that it burn not but to his callings. O good Jesus! who shall give to me that I feel thee. Thou must now be felt and not seen. Enter into the inmost recesses of my soul; come into mine heart, and full fill it with thy most clear sweet-

ness : make my mind to drink deeply of the fervent wine of thy sweet love, that I, forgetting all evils, and all vain visions, and scornful imaginations, thee only embracing, joying I may rejoice in my Lord Jesus.

“Thou most sweet Lord, from henceforward pass not from me ! Dwell with me in thy sweetness ! — for only thy presence is to me solace or comfort, and only thy absence leaves me sorrowful. O thou Holy Ghost, who inspirest where thou wilt, come into me, draw me to thee, that I despise and set at nought in my heart all things of this world. Inflammé my heart with thy love, which shall without end burn upon thine altar.

“There are three degrees of Christ's love, in which those that are chosen to God's love go from one to another. The first is called insuperable, the second is inseparable, the third is called singular. LOVE IS INSUPERABLE — when it cannot be overcome with any other affection or love, or trial or temptation ; when it gladly casts down all other hindrances, and all temptations, and quenches fleshly desires. . . . And blessed is the soul that is in this state ; every labour is light to him that loveth truly, neither can any man better overcome travail than by love.

“LOVE IS INSEPARABLE — when man's mind is inflamed with great love, and cleaves to

Christ by inseparable thought ; not suffering Christ to be any moment out of his mind, but as though he were bound in the heart, him he thinketh upon, to him with great earnestness he draweth his spirit. Therefore, when the love of Christ so groweth in the heart of the lover of God, and the despiser of the world, so that it may not be overcome of any other affection or love, then it is said to be high. When man cleaveth to Christ undepartingly, thinking upon him, forgetting him for no other occasion, then man's love is said to be inseparable and everlasting. And what love can be more or greater than this ?

“ The third degree of LOVE IS SINGULAR. If thou seekest or receivest any other comfort than of thy God, even though thou lovest highly, thou lovest not singularly. This degree is highest and most wonderful to attain, for it hath no peer. Singular love is, when all solace and comfort is closed out of the heart but the love of Jesus alone. Other delight or other joy pleaseth not ; for the sweetness of him is so comforting and lasting—his love is so burning and gladdening, that he who is in this degree may well feel the fire of love burning in his soul. That fire is so pleasant that no man can tell it, but he that feeleth it, and not fully he. Then the soul is Jesus loving, on Jesus thinking, and Jesus desiring, only burning in coveting of him, singing in him, resting on him. . . . He that most withdraws his love

from the world, and from unreasonable lusts, shall be most able, and most speedily increase in these degrees of love. Those that have liking in any other things than in Jesus, and in the sweetness of his law, come not to this degree of love. In the first degree are some, in the second but few, in the third scarcely any. For the higher the living is, and the more it profits, the fewer lovers it hath, and the fewer followers.

“Love is the desire of the heart, ever thinking on that which it loveth. Love is a stirring of the soul to love God for himself, and all other things for God. This love putteth out all other love that is against God’s will. Love is a right will, turned from all earthly things, and joined to God without departing, accompanied with the fire of the Holy Ghost; far from defouling, far from corruption, to no vice bowing, high above all fleshly lusts, ever ready to the contemplation of God; the sun of all good affections, the health of good manners and of the commandments of God, the death of sins, life of virtues, crown of overcomers, the arms of holy thoughts. Without love no man can please God, with it no man sinneth to death The lover of Jesus Christ shall so burn in love that he shall be wholly turned into the fire of love; he shall so shine in virtues that no part of him shall be dark in vices.”

Intensely fervid as are these deep breathings

of a soul whose longings could be fulfilled only in the full enjoyment of God, let it not be supposed that Christianity is a thing which can be reduced to a refined sentimentalism, or pass off in the effervescence of excited feeling. Its principles are all influential, practical principles, which admit of being brought down and embodied in the every-day business and pursuits of life. It is not so much the creed as the character of a man which determines his spiritual condition. We are not the apologists of either a false creed or a false character. But we can never accept a sound belief for an unsound conduct. The grace which brought salvation must teach those who receive it to deny themselves all worldly lusts and pleasures, and to live soberly, justly, and godly, in this present evil world. Such was the teaching of the reformer. He had no idea of turning the grace of God in lasciviousness. The lover and the exemplar of purity, he insisted on righteousness of life in every rank and in every vocation. In confirmation of this, we refer to his *SHORT RULE OF LIFE*,* of which the following outline is the sum and substance :—

“ When thou risest, or fully wakest, think upon the goodness of thy God ; how for his own

* The manuscript of this piece is in the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and is intended “ for each man in general, and for priests, and lords, and labourers, in particular, how each shall be saved in his degree.”

It has been more than once hinted by his biographers that

goodness, and not for any need, he made all things out of nothing, both angels, and men, and all other creatures, good in their kind. . . . Think on the great sufferings and willing death that Christ suffered for mankind. . . . Think how God hath saved thee from death and other mischief, and suffered many thousands to be lost that night, some in water, some in fire, and some by sudden death; and some to be damned without end. And for this goodness and mercy thank thy God with all thine heart. And pray him to give thee grace to spend in that day, and evermore, all the powers of thy soul, and all the powers of thy body, in his service and worship, and to give good example of holy life, both in word and deed, to all men about thee. . . . Look afterward, that thou be well occupied, and be no time idle, for the danger of temptation. Take meat and drink in measure or moderation. . . . Besides this, look thou do right and equity to all men—thy superiors, equals, and servants, and stir all to love truth, and mercy, and true peace, and charity.

a complete edition of Wycliffe's works is a monument due to the illustrious reformer. This THE WYCLIFFE SOCIETY contemplated, and would doubtless have carried into effect, but had to give up their design and sink their very existence for want of corresponding sympathy and support. It occurs to us that it would be far better to make a very careful selection of his best pieces, and subject the style to a slight revision. It is the camel's hair and the leathern girdle of our older writers, their rough and rugged exterior, their wilderness dress, which renders them so repulsive to the refined and higher taste of modern times. Meanwhile, the reader may be profitably referred to a selection of Wycliffe's writings, published by the Religious Tract Society, in their series of the British Reformers.

“Most of all, fear God and his wrath ; and most of all, love God, and his law, and his worship ; and ask not principally for worldly reward, but in all thine heart desire the bliss of heaven in mercy of God, and thine own good life. . . . In the end of the day, think wherein thou hast offended God, and how much and how oft, and therefore have entire sorrow, and amend it while thou mayest. Think how many God hath suffered to perish that day, many ways, and to be damned everlastingly, and how graciously he hath saved thee, not for thy desert, but for his own mercy and goodness, and therefore thank him with all thy heart.

“If thou art A PRIEST, or one having the charge of souls, live holily, surpassing other men in holy prayer, desire, and thinking—in holy speaking, counselling, and true teaching. Let God’s commands, his gospel, and virtues, be ever in thy mouth ; and ever despise sin to draw men therefrom. Let thy deeds be so rightful that no man shall blame them with reason, but that thy open deeds be a true book to all subjects and unlearned men to serve God and do his commands thereby If thou art A LORD or master having authority over others, look thou labour right for life in thine own person, both in respect to God and man, keeping the commandments of God, and doing the works of mercy Govern well thy wife, thy children, and thy household attendants,

in God's law, and suffer no sin among them, neither in word nor in deed, that they may be examples of holiness and righteousness to all others Govern well thy tenants, and maintain them in right and reason, and be merciful to them in their rents and worldly payments, and suffer not thine officers to do them wrong, nor be extortionate to them Love, reward, praise, and cherish the true and virtuous of life, more than if those sought only thine own profit Reverence and maintain truly, according to thy skill and might, God's law and the true preachers thereof, and God's servants who teach Christ's gospel and his life, and warn the people of their great sins, and of false prophets and hypocrites, that deceive Christian men in faith, virtuous life, and worldly goods If thou art A LABOURER, live in meekness, and truly and willingly do thy labour, that thy lord or thy master, if he be a heathen man, by thy meekness, willing and true service, may not have to grudge against thee, nor slander thy God, nor thy Christian profession God that putteth thee in such service knoweth what state is best for thee, and will reward thee more than all earthly lords, if thou dost it truly and willingly for his ordinance. In all things beware of grudging against God and his visitation;—beware of wrath, of cursing, of speaking evil, of banning or execrating man or beast; and ever keep patience, meekness, and charity, both to God and man."

As if clothed with the light and armour of heaven, our reformer took his ground and proclaimed eternal war with error and sin in all their forms. He had to do not so much with the world as with the church. The evils which he dreaded were not from without, but from within. It was not so much with the avowed infidel as with the professed believer, he had to grapple. The grand contest of his age was between a spurious and a true Christianity. He had to enter the lists with those who professed to be the followers of the Lamb. He had to do battle with the church itself. This fact it is which throws light on many of his writings. He looked at Christianity in its pure and practical bearing. He demanded its embodiment in the life, as a thing which had its seat in the heart. A spiritual religion was the great want of that age. It is the want of our own age. And the reformation of the nineteenth century must be sought in restoring to the whole church of God, a pure and living Christianity. It needs no mailed polemic to do battle with error. In all the varying forms which it has put on, it has been manfully and triumphantly met. The struggle is for truth. In this last struggle, the power of darkness will work itself to death; and truth having achieved her final victory, the church shall come out of the crisis and the fiery trial, purer, and healthier, and clothed in the beauties of holiness.

CHAPTER XII.

CLOSING REMARKS BEARING ON THE PRESENT AGE.

Progress of the reformed faith from the death of Wycliffe to the death of Luther—The Reformation of the sixteenth century but the perfecting of Wycliffe's idea—That great change fraught with incalculable benefits—The advantage of Protestantism over Roman Catholicism—Popery unchanged in its principles and tendencies—Not to be overcome by pains and penalties—The genius of religious toleration—Undue favour shown to the Romanists by the civil power—Advantage taken of this fact—England still Protestant at heart—Her Protestantism the palladium of her safety and her glory—Protestantism the embodiment of Christian truth, and Christian truth the only instrumental cause of the regeneration and final salvation of man.

If it enter into the very genius of Christianity to yield the most stable support and consolation amidst all the trials and conflicts of life, then the comfort will be in proportion to the influence of the truth upon the heart, and this again will be in the degree in which the truth is apprehended and realized. Here lay the secret of the fortitude and the joy of Wycliffe and his followers. In the words of the reformer, whose very soul was on fire in the prosecution of his work—"Christ came into the world to bear witness to the truth, and to enlighten men.

And as Christ came hither with this intent, should not the truth keep his disciples, while standing thus for its defence, labouring even unto death?" Relying on the power of that truth, he stood fast in the most critical moment of his history. "During the two years preceding his death, the father of the English reformation was (as we have seen) deserted by the most powerful of his accredited disciples, oppressed by the strength of the hierarchy, and fully anticipating martyrdom," and yet "at such a foreboding crisis, we find his industry in the cause of reform, and his courage in attempting to promote it, augmented rather than diminished." And equally firm were those whom he left to represent and sustain that cause in the world. Political events favoured them in fulfilling their mission. From the accession of the house of Lancaster to the time of the eighth Henry, both prince and prelate, clergy and laity, were found opposing the encroachments of the see of Rome, and the doctrines of the reformer extended amid the kindlings and the wide-spreading flames of persecution. Still the church maintained the ascendancy, and churchmen succeeded to much of the place and the power which had been previously possessed by the lay aristocracy. Enactments were passed, empowering the primate to "correct all who should obstinately preach or maintain, whether publicly or privately, any conclusion as from the sacred Scriptures, while contrary to the determination of the church." The Lollards

petitioned parliament, and parliament began to agitate the question of ecclesiastical reform. The king was in Ireland, and messengers were despatched to lay before him the dangers to which the church was exposed, and to advise his return home. His return effected but little for the party. The pope addressed his majesty, calling upon him to employ his authority, in connexion with that of the hierarchy, to root out and destroy the new heresy. The monarch had enough to do to attend to the temporal affairs of his kingdom. So matters remained till the accession of Henry of Lancaster, who proclaimed himself the protector of the church against the assaults of the Lollards. The force of law now came into play. Penal enactments ran out even to the burning of heretics. And when the sceptre of England passed into the hands of Henry VIII. "the magnitude of papal power was almost beyond estimation. It had never failed to crush its opponents. The movements of the Albigensians had been defeated. The lips of Huss and Jerome had been sealed; and the Lollards had been prostrated beneath its gigantic strength. The world was its home. It had its altars among the vine-hills of France and the barren heaths of Scotland. Its temples stood where the Druid had piled his rude stones, and the Saxon had worshipped Woden. Its splendid ceremonies had charmed the senses of northern clans, and captivated the imagination of southern Europe. It had crowned Pepin, honoured Charlemagne, and immor-

talized Martel. It had decided on astronomy, and maintained the sole umpire in law and politics. It was sovereign at the fireside and every mart of trade. It was a hero in every romance, and a warrior in every battle. It held the keys of heaven and hell. It was above God."

The overthrow of this colossal system was the consummation to which the labours of Wycliffe would have conducted him, and therefore the Reformation of the sixteenth century was but the perfecting of his grand idea. It is true that Luther had a positive advantage over Wycliffe in the advanced position of society, and the consequent preparedness of the nations for that amelioration in their political, social, and spiritual state for which they were yearning, and whose conditions could be fulfilled only by the freedom of the whole man from every enslaving influence. In this light the Reformation brought with it inestimable benefits. Not only was religion raised from the tomb of decay, and re-animated with new life and spirit, but the principles of human government were relaxed and modified; a new stimulus was given to intellectual effort; the most interesting and important branches of science were revived; classical literature, philosophy, and history, were diligently cultivated; the fine arts were carried to a higher point of improvement; education was no longer confined to the priesthood and men of wealth; schools, colleges,

and universities, were thrown open to the people; knowledge and refinement took the place of ignorance and barbarity; the varied relations of life, and the duties arising out of those relations, were more clearly defined and better understood; woman was raised to her proper rank in the scale of being, and the moral tastes and habits of society were all purified and elevated. Let any one compare the social system of the nineteenth century with that of the Middle Ages, and even later down, the pure and happy domestic character of a Protestant people, with the discomfort and the licentiousness of Catholic countries, and how wide the interval!—how perfect the contrast!

From the domination of the papal system, so deteriorating to civilization and social happiness, and all the higher developments and interests of our common humanity, England was delivered at the Reformation. But with this great organic change came no change in Popery. It remained the same in its principles and tendencies. It is the same still. Does not the pope still claim to be the supreme and infallible head of the church—the vicegerent of God—supreme over all mortals—over all emperors, kings, princes, potentates, and people—king of kings and lord of lords—the Divinely appointed dispenser of temporal and spiritual punishments—armed with power to depose sovereigns, and absolve subjects from their oath of allegiance, and from whom lies no appeal?

Does not every popish bishop, at his consecration, solemnly swear to persecute and fight against all heretics, schismatics, and rebels to our lord the pope and his successors? Does not every Jesuit, in his secret oath, swear to do the same thing? Does he not promise and pledge himself, on solemn oath, to extirpate the heretical Protestants' doctrine, and to destroy all their pretended powers, regal or otherwise? Has it not been the constant aim and effort of the Romish church to exalt canon law above civil law, and thus subordinate the crown to the mitre? Is not this her object at the present time? Does she not deny the right of private judgment? Does she not withhold the Scriptures from the people? Does she not assert that the Bible is to be interpreted, not by the exercise of a man's own intelligence, enlightened and guided by the Spirit of God, but by the judgment and authority of the ancient fathers through the church? If she hold some of the essential doctrines of Christianity in their integrity, are they not so overlaid with tradition as almost wholly to veil them from the mind of the people? Or do they not come out so checked, and crossed, and contradicted, and in so incoherent a style of representation, that their salutary influence is enervated, and, except in rare cases, totally prevented? Does she not deem any one who dissents from her creed a heretic? And does she not inculcate that heretics ought to be punished to the very last extreme of the law?

Does she not teach auricular confession? Has not confession tended to undermine the virtue and the happiness of thousands? Have not the most sacred interests of families and of states been sacrificed to this ghostly power? Does not her monastic system form "a vast police of spies and agents, devoted and sworn to promote the papal ascendancy?" With the progress of her ascendancy has she not become pre-eminent in the spirit of persecution? Now any power which interferes with the supremacy of the crown, or with the force of civil law, short of the authority of God, we do most solemnly repudiate. It will be a dark day for England if ever the spiritual and ecclesiastical rule shall gain the ascendancy over the temporal and the civil. We would suffer no jewel of the crown to be tarnished by the touch of a foreign hand. We must know nothing of the bishop of Rome as a temporal sovereign. There may be such a personage, bearing such a designation with all its honours, but we know him not. We owe our undivided allegiance to the throne of England.

Not that we would subject any Romanist to civil pains and penalties on the ground of his religious belief. Among Protestants, it has come to the fixedness of an axiom, that every man has a right to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience, and to use every possible means, compatible with social order, to propagate his distinctive principles and views.

But the Roman pontiff is a temporal prince, as well as a spiritual head. Temporal power is an important element of his spiritual jurisdiction. In proportion as the one is narrowed and limited, the other is rendered comparatively feeble and inefficient. So fully alive to this fact have been the continental states of Europe, both Protestant and Catholic, that all their concessions to the papal power have been accompanied with express stipulations. England is the only European country which, in the plenitude of her freedom, has granted concession after concession to Rome, and asked no guarantee—made no stipulation. Statesmen of all political schools and creeds have crouched and stooped, when they ought to have stood erect, and proved themselves men of rock. Advantage has been taken of this more generous feeling, and the see of Rome has ever been encroaching on the domain of Protestantism, till at length she has claimed all England as her own.

Whatever progress Popery may have made in England, the Protestant element, we believe, is too far down, and too deeply rooted in the national mind, and too intimately blended with the national character, to be easily eradicated or overcome. If the question be, whether we are to abandon those principles which have raised England to her present position, and under whose life-giving influence all her institutions have grown and advanced, till they now challenge the admiration of the whole civilized

world, and to embrace principles which have sunk the proudest states of Europe and of antiquity—whether we shall have the England of the nineteenth century, with all its light, and intelligence, and freedom, and moral peace, or the England of the fourteenth century, with its intellectual bondage, social wretchedness, and spiritual torpor—whether we shall exchange the pure, regenerating, uplifting Christianity of our own day, for the superstitions and corruptions of the Middle Ages—whether we shall be free men, free Englishmen, free Christians, or be the slaves of a foreign yoke—the answer is at hand. Let the stars melt away from heaven's concave, let the sun go out in everlasting night, rather than England should be again reduced, in her social, intellectual, and moral condition, to the point at which she stood before the Reformation! Vain, we cordially trust, is the effort again to impose upon our country the yoke of Popery. Popery is opposed to the genius of our constitution, to the principles of justice, to the teachings of Christianity, to the deep sayings of the book of God. The mind of England is being flooded with light and truth, and truth is the genius of freedom. The fiat has gone forth, and the hour is coming in which it shall be said—Babylon the great, the mother of harlots, and the abomination of the earth, is fallen—is fallen!

Popery pronounces Protestantism to be heresy; but it is a heresy which has saved

England, and made her great, and glorious, and free. It is the palladium of her safety and her glory. Men may anticipate the decline and fall of Britain—they may predict a total eclipse of her light, or think that they see her sun now setting in darkness; but if England will but adhere to her simple, living, Protestant Christianity, we fear not her stability. Like the rock in ocean's midst, at whose base the billow rolls, and dashes, and breaks, she will stand secure amid all those revolutions which the future may conceal, and which will make nations shake and reel to their very centre. The Bible, and the Bible only, contains the religion of Protestants. Protestantism is the very embodiment of Christian truth, and Christian truth is the one great instrument for the regeneration and salvation of man. On his ascension, the Saviour gave it in charge to his church to "go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," promising them his continued presence, and the power of his Spirit. The proclamation of God's love to our fallen race; the necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit; the doctrine of remission of sins through the sacrifice of the cross; the exclusion of all human merit from the ground of a sinner's justification; the purification of the whole nature through the operation of the Holy Ghost, with a life of corresponding practical godliness—these were the prime subjects of apostolic preaching, and before which the philosophy of Greece and the arms of Rome bowed in deep

prostration. These were the doctrines which stirred the soul of Wycliffe, and perfected the reformation of Luther. And these are the doctrines which will conserve England, and make her first among the nations of the earth. In the ministrations of the sanctuary, greater prominence must still be given to those cardinal doctrines which lie at the foundation of the Christian character. An outward formalism must not be allowed to supplant an inward piety. The artistic beauty of the building, or the æsthetic perfection of the service, must not be put in the room of the Saviour's presence. A sickly sentimentalism must not take the place of conscious fellowship with the Spirit of life. A revived piety, and a full embodiment of Christian truth—to these we must look as the great antagonistic power to error in all its modes and manifestations. And if error cannot be overcome by truth, it is worse than vain to employ any other force.

In looking back on the past, nothing can be more clear than that Providence has been the precursor of mercy, and has, from the very outgoings of time itself, been preparing the way for the establishment of that kingdom whose limits are the world, and whose duration is for ever. To this all things have been made to contribute. The rise and fall of empires—the changes and revolutions which have marked their history, with all the agencies and influences affecting their destiny, have been but

so many antecedents to this great result. From the beginning this has been the object of desire and anticipation—the subject of prediction and of prayer. It was a universal expectation that a period was coming, when a greater and more glorious kingdom would be set up in the world. We have only to open the prophetic volume, to perceive how accustomed holy men of God were to rise from the temporal to the spiritual, from the present to the future, from the earthly and the passing to the heavenly and the permanent. They carry us through myriads of events and ages of time, and leave us in fixed contemplation on the glories of that period, when the reign of grace shall be universal, and heaven be reflected from earth in its spiritual purity and blessedness. Thus, in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar as given by Daniel, we find the Babylonish empire giving place to that of the Medes and Persians ; this again succeeded by the Macedonian, and the Macedonian by the Roman, which was to break in pieces all the rest. But, in the progress of time, Rome itself was torn asunder by the incursion of barbarous tribes, and divided into ten kingdoms, corresponding to the ten toes in the image. This took place about the fourth century of the Christian era. But though the glory of that vast and mighty empire has passed away, these ten kingdoms still remain. They, too, are to be broken in pieces by the little stone cut out of the mountain. They must give way before the advanc-

ing kingdom of Christ. The day of their downfall is perhaps not far distant. The prophet tells us that the duration of these kingdoms should be 1260 years. Now, if we date the rise of the popish power from the year 606, in which the pope, by a decree of Phocas, was declared supreme head of the church, this will bring us to within sixteen years of the ultimate fulfilment of this sublime prophecy. Others, however, place it one hundred and fifty years later. But let the time be when it may, the appointed hour is approaching, when He, whose voice is now heard like peals of loudest thunder in the events of the day, will shake not the earth only, but also heaven. The papacy has been smitten once and again. Nor can it stand; it has in it nothing permanent. It shall be destroyed with the brightness of His coming who will put down all rule, and all authority and power. With the downfall of Popery will come the fall of every antichristian power; and on their ruins will rise, in all its greatness and glory, that kingdom which the God of heaven hath set up, which shall never be destroyed; for the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.



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